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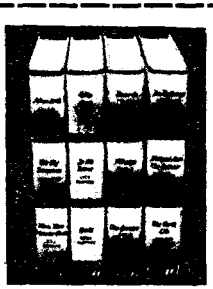

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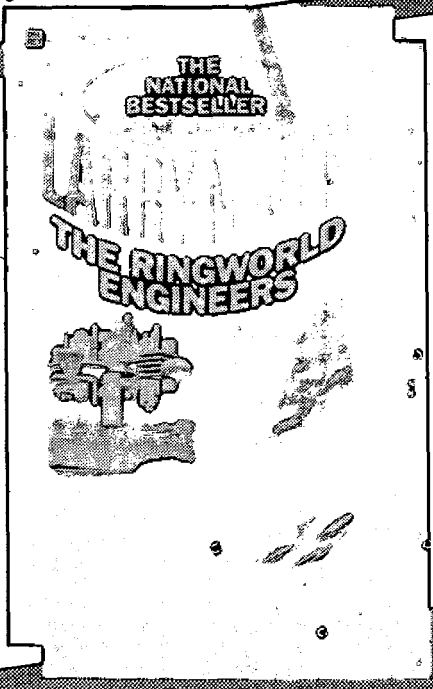

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EDITORIAL: SCIENCE FICTION POETRY

by Isaac Asimov

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When someone writes as much as I do on as many subjects as I do, the impression is bound to arise that I know everything. Not so. I freely admit to areas of ignorance and incomprehension, and one of these areas is that of modern poetry.

Nevertheless, I am bound, by my own understanding of my job as editorial essayist, to discuss every facet of the science fiction field at one time or another; and we do publish occasional poetry. Not much poetry, to be sure; but then no one willingly publishes much poetry these days. —So I'll give my thoughts on the matter, asking you to remember my admitted lack of expertise.

Why do we publish poetry? Why not?

Surely science fictional themes and emotions can be expressed in poetic form now and then. Consider, for instance, the most remarkable example of science fiction poetry (in my opinion) that has ever been written. It was published in 1842 and here it is:

For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging through the thunderstorm;

Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle-flags were furled

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In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

Aerial commerce and aerial warfare (the "ghastly dew" might even be an unconscious foreshadowing of radioactive fallout) culminating in a world-government are foreseen. Not bad for 1842!

The chances are that you are familiar with the passage, which is a measure of its success, for it has been quoted and requoted endlessly. It is from "Locksley Hall" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Concerning its quality I have nothing to say; I am no judge. However, it scans perfectly and it rhymes, too.

Scansion and rhyme, together with other devices such as alliteration, assonance, and so on, grew up in English poetry out of the needs of an illiterate society. When people can only tell a long story

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from memory, rhythm and rhyme are an enormous help. It is for this reason that the epic poem is as old as history, while the prose novel is a creature of modern times and a literate society.

Thanks to the rhythm and rhyme, the passage I quoted can be easily memorized and is pleasant to recite. Tennyson also supplies us with colorful phrases that are impossible to forget, once read. (The same poem contains the line: *In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.*)

Then, too, the content is science fictional beyond cavil. Indeed, later in the poem is a couplet that states what I might call the central dogma of science fiction, and does so in a way that, in my opinion, cannot be improved:

Not in vain the distance beckons. Forward, forward let us range;
Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.

And yet all those poetic devices that make poetry quotable, however useful in an illiterate society, are irritatingly confining once the society grows literate. The poet finds that the restrictive rules of such poetry, the endless jigging alternation of stresses, the deadly repetition of final syllables and initial letters all force him into saying what he wants to say in second- or third-best fashion, because first best won't fit. It forces him into archaisms, inversions, elisions, and other artificialities. It wears him out to no purpose.

Nowadays, therefore, rigid scansion and careful rhyme are confined, almost entirely, to light verse and to sentimental ballads. In the former case, the jigging and repetition are strong elements in the humor being sought for; in the latter case, they help the words fit the music and let the singer remember how it goes.

There's nothing essentially wrong with light verse, of course. Most of what we print is light verse, which is usually short, straightforward, comprehensible, and often, humorous. The three contests I have set up, involving acrostic sonnets, double dactyls, and limericks, all involved light verse. In each of the three cases, the output was judged on mechanical perfection and on wit; in no case, did I try to judge poetic content.

But if you take away rhyme and meter and all those other devices, what's left? Haven't you abolished poetry?

Not really. We're so used to the appurtenances, we mistake them for the real thing. It's like imagining that if males and females stripped, the first removing their shirts and pants and the latter their blouses and skirts, it would then become impossible to tell the

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sexes apart.

The central core of poetry is compression and combination. The trick is to say a great many things in short space by the clever use of words not only for their literal meanings, but for their fringe-shades, their connotations and associations, and by combining words in such a way that together they take on more and deeper meaning than either word would if they stood separately.

Furthermore, modern poetry seems to be largely autobiographical. That is, the poet talks chiefly about the self, its experiences and emotions; and through the poetry we can come to know the poet deeply. Where a long, reasoned, logical essay might, like the steady, calm light of the Sun, gloss over a person's character and show the surface only, a heartfelt piece of poetry under a hundred words long might illuminate a person's character in a flash of x-rays, showing an uncertain glimpse of something not otherwise visible at all. And if we come to understand one person, the poet, more deeply than is possible in flat prose, we might, by that fact, understand ourselves and all humanity more deeply as well.

That sounds like a huge advantage to be gained by shaking one's self free of the artificial shackling of syllables-by-order, but there are disadvantages:

1) It is hard to do. Because there are no artificial rules and it is all a matter of well-chosen words in well-arranged juxtaposition, it seems to the amateur that anyone can do it. And everyone tries. The result is that most modern poetry is, I suspect, simply awful. But then we know, by Sturgeon's Law, that most of anything is simply awful.

2) It is intellectual. The meaning is not on the surface; it can't be. There isn't *room* on the surface; and some of the meaning has to be underneath, in layers under layers if the poem is good enough and rich enough. This means that the reader must work at it and think of it and consider subsidiary meanings of words, and the association of various words in combination. It's not easy. Most people aren't equipped to do it because they don't know the language subtly enough or the poet deeply enough. Some people who *are* equipped to do so have other things to do and don't want to "waste their time" at the job. (In this latter category, I am afraid that I myself am included.)

3) It isn't easily quotable. The absence of rhythm and rhyme, the juxtaposition of words—not for beauty of sound but for depth of meaning—makes the poem hard to memorize, hard to recite, and hard to listen to. While none of this diminishes the essential value

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of the poem, it does diminish the casual pleasure in it.

4) It isn't immediately moving. When there was talk of decommissioning the *U.S.S. Constitution* ("Old Ironsides") as hopelessly obsolete, a 21-year-old medical student, Oliver Wendell Holmes, wrote a poem that began: *Ay, tear her tattered ensign down* that was printed in a newspaper and that brought a lump to the throat of every reader. (It *still* does, at least to mine.) Millions of people were moved to protest against the action and into contributing money to save the ship. Even schoolchildren brought in their pennies. And the ship was *saved*. It still exists, and no one would ever dream of decommissioning it. I don't know of any modern poem that could possibly achieve such a result.

Such disadvantages are important from the standpoint of a magazine like ours, which must please its readers. We can print modern poetry if it strikes us as unusually good, but we can never expect a majority of our readers to approve—so we can't do it often. We therefore stick, for the most part, to light verse, old-fashioned in its structure, but easy, pleasurable, and usually eliciting a smile.

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ON BOOKS
by Baird Searles

Dream Park by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes, Ace, $5.95 (paper).
Valis by Philip K. Dick, Bantam, $2.25 (paper).
Black Easter and The Day After Judgement by James Blish, Gregg Press, $16.95.
The Sixth Book of Virgil Finlay, edited and published by Gerry de la Ree, $15.75
Opus 200 by Isaac Asimov, Dell, $2.50 (paper).
The Science Fiction Writer's Workshop I by Barry Longyear, Owlswick Press, $5.95 (paper).

One would have had to have been in a coma for the past few years not to be aware of the fantasy gaming fad which has swept the country, certainly a most curious outgrowth of science fiction and fantasy (in which its antecedents lie a good deal more than in Monopoly). There has, inevitably, been some genre fiction using fantasy gaming as a take-off point (a whole series, in fact: Hugh Walker's "War Gamers' World" trilogy); so far as I know, though, there have been no murder mysteries based on it, though that's a field in which I don't claim to be au courant.

I mention murder mysteries because Lary Niven and Steven Barnes have collaborated on an absolutely dandy novel that is not only SF, but a mystery story as well. (Niven, of course, has played in that area before, with his Gil Hamilton stories.) It's called *Dream Park.*

Dream Park is a vast amusement park of the future, which thank God is not viewed as an allegorical symbol of civilization, or even a plotting ground for world domination; it's a place where people go to have fun, a revolutionary idea for an amusement park in science fiction lately.

One of the ways people have fun there is to join in elaborate fantasy games, which can last for days and which are implemented by the incredible facilities for illusion which the Park possesses. Various psychic powers that the players may choose to have are simulated electronically, as are injuries and deaths. There are, in fact, endless complexities in the production of a game, which Messrs. Niven and Barnes have thought through and elucidated very neatly.

The novel concerns one game specifically and the group of people

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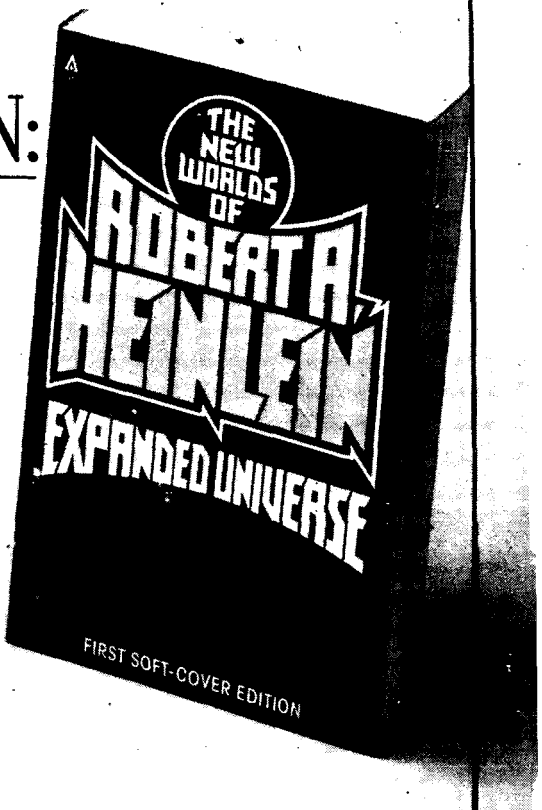

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involved in it. It is a very important game, almost a grudge match between the Game Master (really Masters, since it's a husband-and-wife team) who creates and directs the game from outside, and the Lore Master, who in essence is challenging the Game Master by leading his group through the adventure with as few casualties as possible, and by finding or accomplishing the object of the quest which lies at the heart of every game plan.

(The authors do *not* assume that the reader knows all about fantasy gaming; the novel, in fact, is rather a good introduction to it for those who have felt that involvement in what seems to be a lifetime occupation may be more than they want.)

This particular game is also enlivened by a killing—a *real* one—which is not of one of the gameplayers, but which could only have been done by one of them. Dream Park's Chief of Security therefore joins the game-in-progress to find out—what else—who done it?

Obviously, not much more can be said about the plot (that's the critic's code). I will note that the setting of the central contest, which is called the "South Seas Treasure Game," is New Guinea, and the superstitions, magic, theology, and lore of its inhabitants, particularly the incredible Cargo Cult which sprang up there after World War II. This is not only nicely original, but leads to wonderful anachronistic confrontations such as that of Panthesilea, Queen of the Amazons (a character chosen by one of the gameplayers as her own personna in the game) against a horde of zombies, New Guinea style.

Maybe my one real quibble with *Dream Park* is its characters. There's a slew of them (I was grateful for a *dramatis personae* that is provided) and one finds out very little about them and their lives outside the immediate game; this may have been a device of the authors' to focus entirely on the world of the game itself, but this also makes for a lack of dimension in most of them. My objection may also be to the fact that what does come across makes most of them ho-ho-ho gameplaying, *pour le sport* types; certainly perfectly accurate in terms of the plot, but I have just never been able to warm up to people who dissolve over a six-pack of beer.

There are also some unfortunate sexual stereotypes, including the omniscient female who knows all about what's going on inside the big, little boy she's involved with, and another I don't dare mention for fear of giving the whole show away (the critic's code again).

I guess I'm asking too much, though, from a novel that is (1) a rousing, all-in-one-boat adventure (2) a competent and challenging

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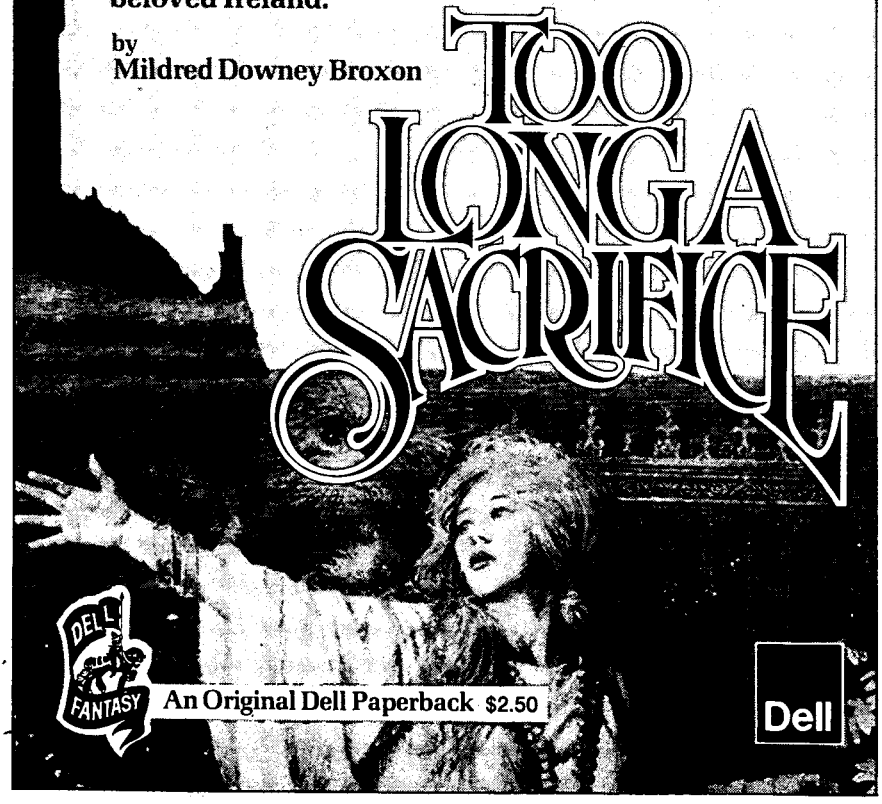

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murder mystery (3) a fantasy dealing with the magic of a most unusual culture, and (4) a work of SF very well extrapolated from a current phenomenon. That's quite enough for any book.

And speaking of superstitions and theology, there's Philip K. Dick's new novel, *Valis*. Now if there's one thing I dislike more than people telling me their dreams, it's people telling me their drug experiences, particularly the religious ones. I disliked *Valis* a whole lot.

It's written in the first person by a narrator who editorializes a great deal and tells us a lot more than we (or at least I) want to know about a character named Horselover Fat. Early on, we are informed that the narrator and Horselover Fat are one and the same, and it is being written in this way to give "much-needed objectivity." Later the narrator refers to several of his (the narrator's) books, such as *The Man In the High Castle* and *A Scanner Darkly*. Make of this what you will.

Horselover Fat has had an encounter with God à la St. Paul about which he is writing an endless exegesis, of which we are told all too much. God may, in fact, be an alien or may be Horselover Fat from the far future (as opposed to the near past; Horselover Fat comes across as one of those embarrassing hippies left over from two decades ago). He (they?) encounter a child, daughter of a jet-set rock singer, who may be a computer terminal, or God, or the Wisdom of the World, or . . . There are lots of quotes from Schopenhauer, Xenophanes, Wordsworth et al., not to mention an eight-page appendix of yet more quotes. Need I go on?

This all may be one big, boring joke or it may be meant seriously; it doesn't much matter. *Valis* is embarrassingly, datedly hip, cute, and infinitely tedious, so far as I'm concerned. A major danger to science fiction these days is in its becoming the new mysticism, what with flying saucers, gods' chariots, Bermuda Triangles and all. Writers such as Mr. Dick are not helping matters.

On the other hand, a recent reprint shows just how well it can work when mysticism and metaphysics are handled by a science-fictional mind. The work is James Blish's *Black Easter,* which has been republished in hard cover with its sequel, *The Day After Judgement.* (The latter has been a very hard book to find for several years.)

Black Easter is an extremely succinct, straightforward account of what happens when a wealthy munitions manufacturer with an esthetic passion for destruction goes to black magician of great

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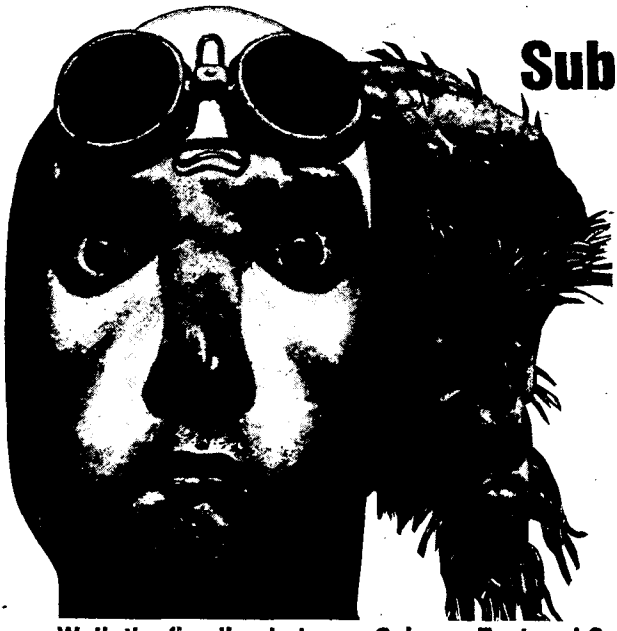

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power and after setting several test tasks (such as arranging the death of the governor of California), suggests that he will pay a fortune to have all the demons of Hell released for a single night. The offer is accepted and, quite literally, all Hell breaks loose.

Despite what seems to be, in precis, a plot of monumental nonsensicality, *Black Easter* is one of the most chilling books I have ever read. This is partially due to Blish's coldly scientific handling of it, as well as his staggering knowledge of medieval (?) demonology.

I had not read *The Day After Judgement* before. Quite frankly, I had held off until duty called for the current review because, while in one way, one is intensely curious about the events after *Black Easter,* in another the novel is so perfect as it stands that I didn't want to know any more.

As it turns out, my instinct was right. The sequel *is* an anticlimax, as I think anything would be. But it is a splendidly done and intelligent anticlimax and I don't recommend *not* reading it.

(I can't resist throwing out a clue to one of the funnier of SF in-jokes. Pay particular attention to the names of the monks gathered to combat the forces of darkness in *Black Easter.)*

This month's column, through no design of mine, does seem to be turning into a sort of science fiction and the occult as a blend thesis. Being the dedicated Virgil Finlay admirer that I am, I can't let a new collection of the work of that artist (perhaps the finest that the SF pulps ever produced) go unremarked, and by golly, what is it but a collection of his astrological drawings, done for various magazines of popular astrology?

The works were done between 1960 and 1970; there are five to twelve for each zodiacal sign plus miscellaneous drawings for articles, and they are among the best of his illustrations I have ever seen (and believe me, I have seen many). Typical is the one chosen for the dust jacket (and apropos to our SF/occult orientation this month): Aries portrayed as a brooding knight in armor—or is it a space suit? Finlay uses the symbols of astrology but does not confine himself to them; there is a fabulous mermaid for Pisces, and a bull's head wonderfully conceived in Egyptian style for Taurus.

All credit to publisher and editor Gerry de la Ree for giving us a sixth collection of Finlay's works as good as the first five. The book, by the way, is called *The Sixth Book of Virgil Finlay.*

And now for something completely different, in the words of the immortal Monty Python . . . You may recall, a few months back,

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that I had suggested that I would like some feedback on the question of devoting some space periodically to the matter of collecting. The heavy response took me by surprise, thanks to all of you that let me know of your interest. And my kindly editor has OK'd the idea, also. So be it.

Let me first again caution the reader that I make no claims as to Absolute Authority in the area of collecting. There are people of far greater knowledgeability than myself (and with far larger collections); they, unfortunately, are too busy doing it to take the time to write about it, it seems. My own modest hoard consists mostly of items I have acquired because I liked them and wanted them for what they were.

As a matter of fact, that's a good place to start, I think; it's always a good idea to take a look at the very basics, in this case, what to collect, and why.

Why is the easier question to answer. It boils down to two major factors, love and lust. The love factor is simple—you collect things because you love them and want to own them—this is *not* a capital sin, no matter what the antimaterialists say, so don't feel guilty about it. The lust factor divides into two. One is the lust for completion, peculiar to the kind of mind that can not rest until it has all the parts of a whole (a series, a set, whatever); again, nothing

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wrong with this, except that as with lust in general it may lead to the acquisition of things you don't love. The second aspect of lust is that for the monetary gain, based on the fact that if more than one person wants something, it grows in value. Therefore, collectibles often tend to grow in value if they're in a field that becomes more popular as time goes by.

This certainly describes SF and fantasy at the moment. Then add to this the fact that SF readers seem to be collectors by definition (probably because of a high percentage of minds tending toward the first aspect of lust mentioned above; SF people like to complete sets, to see logic and orderly patterns made out of confusion). I'm sure there are collectors of detective stories and Westerns, but I would guess the percentage of the readers of those genres who hang on to their books is much lower; i.e. most readers of science fiction already have collections without feeling that they are Collectors with a capital C.

But if you do want to collect, there comes the question of *what* to collect. It's easy enough to say "science fiction," but that covers a lot of ground these days. I do know a few absolute completists and have seen the collection of one; it is in a specially built wing of his house and is awe-inspiring. But that is literally a life's work, and beyond the resources and even abilities of most people, for whom it should be simply an enjoyable avocation. So you choose to specialize.

One logical area is to collect all the editions of all the works of a favorite author or authors. If it is a younger writer whom you think will continue, there is the challenge of buying his/her works as they appear and go through various editions. With an older author with more books to his/her credit, the fun is to track down various editions of the past. (The varying covers on a single work in various editions can be fascinating; for instance, the covers over the years on the novels of A. Merritt—of whom I'm particularly fond—are strange and wonderful, and the various cover interpretations of *Stranger In A Strange Land* are wildly diverse.)

There are various publisher's special editions, such as the Ace doubles which were published from the 1950s to the 1970s, and which introduced many authors who are now major names. And that brings up first editions, which are particularly interesting in science fiction, since so many important works were first published in paperback. (That is why paperbacks have really only recently become a major factor in the collector's market.)

You might, as I am, be drawn to the smaller format paperbacks

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which disappeared in the '60s (they seem almost like miniatures now). Or the works of a particular cover artist. There are the products of wonderful specialty houses of the past, such as the beautiful Fantasy Press books with their uniform bindings of various colors, or the great black-and-gold Arkham House editions. (This starts getting pricey—some of the early publications of Arkham House, which, of course, still exists, have increased in value over 10,000%; i.e., a book with a cover price of $3.00 can now bring $300. This indicates what a good investment some books can be, also.)

As you can see, there are innumerable ways to go, and I haven't even mentioned science fiction art, which is at the moment booming, or the magazines (some of the earlier of which have increased in value to an enormous extent also). Let me emphasize that there is no rule to the effect that one has to collect only in certain areas, but that does make the challenge of hunting, and the triumph of finding, all the more fun.

In later columns, I'll try to touch on the tools of collecting, cataloging, and the tricky question of preservation.

And, as usual, closing with the announcement of publications written or edited or published by people connected with this magazine: *Opus 200,* selections from Isaac Asimov's second one-hundred books, and *The Science Fiction Writer's Workshop I* by Barry Longyear.

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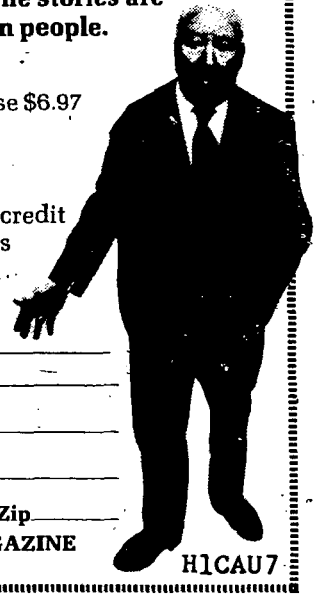

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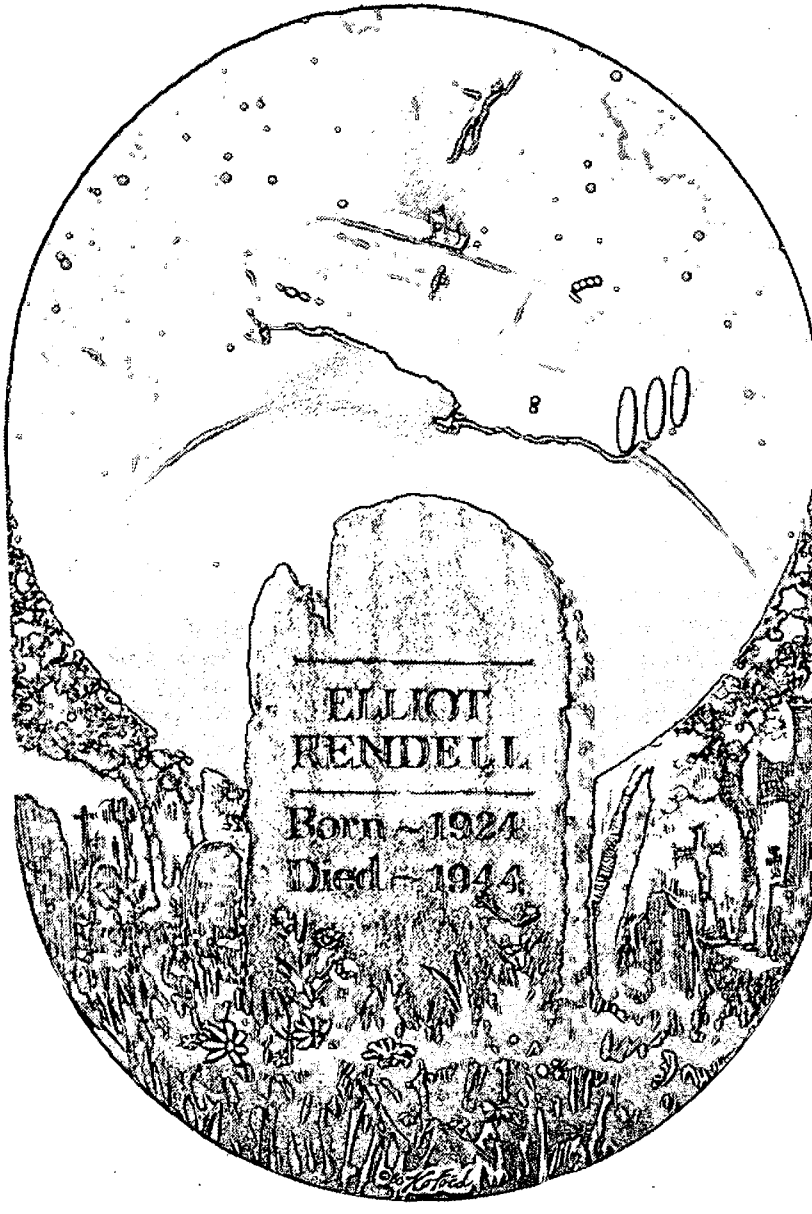

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I HAVE A WINTER REASON

by Melisa Michaels

art: Karl B. Kofoed

It's been all too long since Ms. Michaels's most recent (and very first, for that matter) appearance in these pages, 'way back in January, '79.

There are ghosts among the asteroids. Ghosts of warriors and workers, ghosts of pilots and passengers, and ghosts of the Gypsies who originally settled the Belt. The Gypsies speak in ancient Romani, and ask nothing of anyone but that they be left to their dreams.

I never heard them before the accident. I never had nightmares before, either. Nor a metal plate in my head to hold my brains in. At first I wondered if that had anything to do with it, with the ghosts and the nightmares. But when I asked the doctors, they muttered polysyllabically about survivor guilt, said I should feel grateful my pretty face wasn't marred, and suggested I might be due for a vacation.

I'd read about survivor guilt. My cousin Michael was a warrior in the Colonial Incident. Since we were infrequently but permanently in correspondence with one another, I read every chip I could find on the Incident and its aftermath, both socio-politically and on an individual scale for the warriors involved. Survivor guilt was one of the primary components of what the psych-tenders called "PCIS": Post Colonial Incident Syndrome.

My cousin Michael and I never talked about PCIS. We didn't mention the Incident much, either. His sister was killed in the Battle of Viking Plain. His first wife Maria was a member of the Lost Platoon. After the Incident he married at least one of his childhood sweethearts and produced a litter of little michaels all named something out of the Bible like Elijah and Judah and Jonas. I imagined them as red-haired and freckled and impish as Michael himself had been the last time I saw him, twenty years ago on Earth.

If anyone had a right to survivor guilt, it was Michael. And he mentioned occasional nightmares, but no ghosts. He made a good living in the Colonies and had a life as secure and prosaic and safe as any good Earther could dream of.

His wild warrior days were behind him. He'd gone off to war, suffered whatever agonies and indignities the lowly warrior is ex-

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pected to suffer, killed who he was supposed to kill and survived the opportunity to be killed himself, and went home when the Incident was over to make a real life for himself. If he ever heard the Gypsies, he never mentioned them.

Maybe it wouldn't be the Gypsies for him. Maybe it would be the warriors he'd listen to. But whatever, it seemed to me that if an ex-warrior could make a life for himself, the survivor of a stupid accident like mine should, too.

I took another shuttle out and damn near killed us all when I heard the Gypsies singing. My passengers never knew how close it was, but I did. I decided maybe the psych-tenders were right. Maybe I could use a vacation.

The reunion wasn't really planned; it just happened. I thought I'd visit my parents on Earth and drop by Mars to visit Michael on my way home. When I got to Earth, I learned Michael had selected the same week to visit his parents, and brought his family.

Meanwhile, Michael's mother invited a cluster of older relatives—aunts, uncles, grandparents, and great-somethings—to North America at the same time. Most of them lived in the senior-citizen resorts in the islands, and Rendell family reunions were usually held there.

But, as one plump, pipe-smoking great-aunt remarked, "The old folks still like to see a bit of the world now and then." (To which another added in sepulchral tones, "Old ain't dead," and she nodded sagely in agreement with herself for several minutes thereafter.)

I probably wouldn't've made the trip if I'd had any idea how *many* Earth-based Rendells were going to show up at the same time. The inevitable culture shock of coming Earthside was bad enough, without the added nerve-wracking knowledge that there were so many related Earthers watching to see what bizarre and unacceptable character traits I might've picked up in twenty years in the Belt.

There were the usual round of comments. Goodness, I had grown into a pretty woman. Didn't I look just like my mother had, at my age? And was it true I was a shuttle pilot? (This last was always asked incredulously, as though a shuttle was about the most unacceptable thing possible to pilot, and piloting itself the most unacceptable job they could think of. I suppose it was. On Earth, the women stay home and raise families. They wear make-up and long dresses and giggle behind fans. Not all of them, of course, but the 'best' of them.)

I nodded and smiled till my face hurt, and very quickly switched

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from natural coffee, which had seemed such an exotic treat when I first planeted, to the soy beer the rest of them were drinking.

That was exotic, too; on the asteroids there are plenty of alcoholic beverages but not much time to drink them. Nor much inclination; getting drunk is not one of the socially accepted forms of entertainment in the Belt as it is on Earth. But the alcohol helped dull my hypersensitivity to the cultural and environmental differences that otherwise unnerved me.

My first day planetside, it rained. Water, huge drops of it, fell right out of the sky. Out of thunderclouds piled as high as eternity like towering wads of dirty air-filter material overhead. Sky was a concept I'd got myself ready for, before I planeted. Water falling out of it was something else again.

Then there was the air. Limitless, breathable air, unchambered, unguarded; and it *moved.* It took me two full days to get over the feeling, every time I stepped out of a dwelling, that my chamber had blown a giant leak and I should dive for a space suit.

Being outside was okay in itself. I was ready for that. But I guess I'd thought of it as some kind of oversized chamber with attendant overhead megawattage to light it and the usual filters and controls to keep the air in.

Even a gentle breeze I could've accepted; in large chambers, the air does *move,* sometimes enough that you can feel it. But not briskly. When air moves briskly, people had better move briskly, too, if they want to go on breathing.

While I was getting used to air that moved briskly, and water that fell out of the sky, indigenous life forms bit me. They left little red welts that swelled and itched. Mosquitoes, gnats, flies. . . . None of this was entirely new, of course. I did live Earthside the first ten years of my life. But in twenty years gone I'd forgot what to expect of a planet. Not all the rediscovery was fun.

Even the temperature wasn't properly regulated. I suppose I should amend that statement; I've put it in terms of the asteroids. On Earth, God regulates the temperature, and mostly what She does is assumed to be for the best. But in the area of temperature control I thought She did a lousy job.

After four days Earthside I was still too uncomfortable to do much of anything at midday but sip soy beer in the shade and sigh a lot. I'd spent most of my time so far saying hello to various relatives whose names I promptly forgot, and listening to little lectures from my mother on How a Proper Earther Behaves in a Hostile Environment, like for instance we don't talk to strangers in bars and we

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don't go for walks in the middle of night by ourselves and we don't use the salad fork for dessert and we don't . . .

I forgot what all we don't. On the fifth day, I found myself at midday sitting at a picnic table in the shade across from my cousin Michael, both of us sipping soy beer while all the Earthers were inside eating lunch. God regulates the temperature on Mars, too (with a little help from the Terraformers), but on Mars She keeps the heat to a reasonable minimum. Michael didn't seem any more comfortable in the broiling sun of Earth than I. And I was 'way too hot to eat.

It was the first time we'd been alone together, and we had nothing to say to each other. The groundcover around the picnic table had little white flowers that attracted some of the indigenous life forms I thought might want to bite me. Mostly bees in this case, I think. They hummed and buzzed, and the moving air rustled the leaves of the big old deciduous tree that shaded us, and we didn't look at each other.

I kept tilting my head back every once in a while to get a look at the puffy white clouds that dotted the deep blue sky. I didn't like to look at it too long. It made my eyes dizzy.

"Penny for your thoughts," said Michael.

He'd grown man-size and then some in the twenty years since I'd last seen him. Somehow I hadn't expected that; nor the serious, intent way he looked at people; nor the sudden, stunning beauty of his rare smile. When we were children I thought he was plain. A red-headed, freckle-faced monster, good for nothing but tormenting girl-cousins.

Now he sat with a baby on his lap and patted it absently when it complained—the perfect image of the ideal father. I wondered, but didn't ask, how many wives he had at home. If he had more than the one he'd brought with him, he wouldn't mention it here. Earthers still maintain their rigid, centuries-old stand on monogamous marriage through thick and thin.

"What's a penny?" I asked. "I've always wondered."

He shrugged, a gesture I was aware of though I didn't turn to look at him. There was something about the way those eyes watched me. . . . I wouldn't look. "It was a U.S. coin," he said. "Prob'ly worth a fortune as a collectable by now, so I hope you don't accept the offer."

I glanced up, expecting to see the freckle-faced boy I'd known, and saw instead a dark-eyed stranger. This was a man to whom I'd been writing the intimate details of my life and times—with a few notable

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details left out, like for instance my stupid accident and the ghosts and nightmares—for years, but he looked like a stranger. A relative stranger.

There were hints of the red-haired boy in his mannerisms, but not in those deep eyes. I wasn't sure that I wanted to confide in him out loud. "I was thinking," I said, watching him, "how many rules there are to follow on Earth."

The dark eyes widened almost imperceptibly. His face was lean and vulnerable, devoid of freckles. "Rules?"

I looked back at the sky. It hurt my eyes, but not as much as looking at him. I wanted to cry when I looked at him. I didn't know why. "You know," I said. "Social rules. Acceptable behavior."

I wasn't really sure he did know. Except in the matter of marriages, the colonies were nearly as strait-laced as Earth. He might be perfectly comfortable here. Even the environment was more familiar to him than to me. He was used to sky, and clouds, and all-day gravity, and houses, and the whole long list of everything physical that made this so different from the asteroids. All the things that made me uncomfortable, perpetually on edge, alert on a subliminal level because things were so uncontrolled, so gut-level *wrong*. I stared at Michael over the top of my beer, waiting.

He met my gaze without blinking. The baby on his lap complained briefly, and he patted its back with automatic tenderness. "It's not really very important," he said. "If you don't know a rule—"

"—they'll crow over it," I said. "You were going to say they'd excuse me because I'm from the Belt, right? Well, wrong. Haven't you seen the cat-faced old ones watching? Didn't you see the way they eyed my tables manners and hung on every casual word I spoke at dinner last night? Aunt Hazel and Uncle Alfred and Grandma Rendell—they're just waiting to pounce."

He studied me. I wanted to look away, but didn't. "Sounds paranoid," he said seriously.

It reminded me of the psych-tenders, and I grinned. "Even paranoids have enemies," I said. "People hate us."

Something dark crossed his eyes like a shadow from the sun. "Not hate," he said with startling certainty.

I stared. "'Course not," I said. "Was a joke." Then I remembered, and frowned. "Oh. I've read that before, from veterans of the Incident. Loaded word?"

He hesitated. "I guess I have a lot of them," he said. " 'Incident' is another."

"Sorry. I know they called it a war in the colonies."

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His eyes went so dark inside themselves I couldn't look at them. "It *was* a war," he said. "You weren't there, you don't—"

"I know. Noboby who wasn't there gets to talk about it. I've read *that* before, too. So space it, okay?" Suddenly unaccountably sad, I gulped down half my beer before turning back to the sky.

"Sorry," he said.

I ignored him. I hadn't realized before I planeted how *big* a sky would be. I wasn't really accustomed to it yet. Staring into the bottomless blue, I thought suddenly, *If the gravity generator fails now . . .*

Shivering, I clutched the table, and forcibly reminded myself of the laws of physics. The Earth itself was the gravity generator here, and that couldn't fail.

"You can't handle sky, can you?"

His voice startled me. In my moment of private terror I'd nearly forgotten his presence. But with his words, the world fell back into place and I heard again the moving air in the deciduous tree overhead, and the discordant jangle of birdsongs in the distance.

"I can handle *any*thing," I said with undue ferocity, and lifted my beer.

"Even rules?" he asked.

I put the beer down and stared at him. I really didn't know who he was. I never heard this voice in his letters. We corresponded on printout chips, not voice; but I'd imagined the voice that typed the words he sent would sound different from this. . . . This was a total stranger. My cousin Michael.

"If I have to," I said carefully. "Even rules."

He grinned triumphantly. It lighted his whole face till even the darkest shadows of his eyes were banished and I saw, just for a moment before the smile faded, the face of the freckled child I knew. "Gotcha," he said.

I couldn't return the smile. I was living on nerves alone, and they were badly jangled. The air kept moving, the indigenous life forms kept biting and singing, and the sky stretched untold kilometers above my head with a sun in it so near and so hot I found it hard to understand how this planet ever came to be settled in the first place. The fact that our ancestors evolved here was irrelevant. It was a hostile environment.

And now I saw a gaggle of elders emerging from the house, sloe-eyed and content from their meal. I couldn't face them. I could not, at that moment, tolerate their eyes—or their rules—or my cousin Michael, the stranger.

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"I'm going for a walk," I said, and rose without waiting for a reply. The elders, and Michael too, could make of it what they would; I didn't really care if it was bad form to walk away from them. I walked.

I wanted to cry. I'd had too much beer—far more than I was used to—and I was turning into a weepy drunk. There's probably something more tiresome than a weepy drunk, but I couldn't think just then what it would be.

I concentrated on the groundcover underfoot. I couldn't remember what it was called, but it smelled delicious. Like something from which one might make an excellent tea. And it was most extraordinary to be permitted to walk on green growing things. The novelty of that wasn't even beginning to wear off.

Nor was the scent of things on Earth, really, though I felt homesick for the sweet damp tang of metal and rock of the asteroids. Things on Earth smelled of colors. Green for the groundcover, purple and red and yellow for the flowers, rich black for the loamy soil. Even sunlight had an odor. Hot, and a hint of green and yellow mixed with the tang of memories.

The Rendell residence—my parents' white clapboard home—was right on the edge of town, and I headed out for the dark green fields where nobody would stare if I did cry. Which is how I found myself walking past the rusting wrought-iron-fence of a cemetery after a while.

I'd forgotten cemeteries. It took a moment for the full significance of the white crosses and colored granite blocks to sink in. Earthers buried their dead whole—or at least those dead whose parts weren't reusable, or whose relatives chose not to permit their reuse.

Each cross or stone marked the final resting place of someone's body. Spiritless, empty husks—yet many of the sites were decorated with cut flowers. And there was a feeling of serenity here that wasn't only the result of air moving in trees, or singing birds and insects.

I paused outside the gate, waiting to hear the Gypsies. Afraid to hear the Gypsies. Maybe afraid I wouldn't hear the Gypsies. I closed my eyes, and opened them again abruptly when what I saw on the inside of my eyelids was the reflection of Django's smile.

But Django wasn't here. He was somewhere lost in the Belt, floating and singing, singing. . . .

I stared at the crosses and granite blocks; and the world seemed curiously still, as if in waiting. I glanced back toward the little village I'd left behind. My parents' house was half-hidden behind a low deciduous forest. Somewhere not very far away a bird burst

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into a brief, impulsive song. Meadowlark? I'd been told the song of a meadowlark was very beautiful. I decided it was a meadowlark.

I didn't know the rules about cemeteries. It could be illegal or ill-mannered to explore one out of curiosity. But the strange serenity within that gate was tempting beyond measure. My soul was beer-sodden chaos. My nerves were in a state of ill repute. And I was, I belatedly realized, crying.

My cousin Michael asked if I could handle "even rules," and I told him I could. The song of dead Gypsies was another matter, but he didn't ask after that and I wasn't telling. I stepped inside the gate. If exploring were illegal, surely an ignorant Belter would be forgiven the transgression. And if it were merely bad manners, I didn't give a damn.

The first gravestone I read was inscribed in bold, stone-cut letters:

ELLIOT RENDELL–BORN 1924–DIED 1944.

I paused, staring, barely aware of the breeze that bent the tallest weeds, or the sick-sweet scent of mouldering flowers that wafted up from the cracked stone vase beside the granite marker. ELLIOT RENDELL. A relative? Some multi-great-uncle or cousin?

The meadowlark burst into song again just as I bent to touch the sun-warmed stone. It might have been an omen.

My fingers sank deep into the unforgiving past. Cold and hard and empty, the stone resisted my touch with unexpected hostility. Someone very far away, in a voice I didn't recognize, called my name. I didn't respond. I froze still and bewildered but not quite frightened, my fingers caught up against the stone in memories not my own:

The chatter of an automatic weapon. The shrill death-voice of mortar fire. The screams, the pitiful howling cries and the tangy dark scent of blood and scattered earth. . . . A sense of fear. A sense of failure. A sense of overwhelming loss. . . . There were vultures raucous in the hard blue sky. There were shadows, converging; there were the screams of the damned and the dying, and the salt taste of tears in my mouth; and through it all the fierce longing like unappeasable hunger—PLEASE GOD I WANT—

With a startled whimper I jerked my fingers away from the stone and fell back into here-and-now in a rush that left me dizzy. The sky was a million kilometers above my head. Below my head? I choked on a scream and threw myself full-length in the dusty groundcover, fingers clawing for some safe purchase in the hard

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black earth beneath, and inadvertantly I touched another stone.

REBECCA GARDENER RENDELL

it said.

BORN 1966–DIED 2054.

There were pretty red roses as sweet and deep and perfect as God could make them. Very carefully she pricked out their image with needle and thread on the hem of the little dress, and thought with whimsical regret how much sweeter if the stitched ones could be scented as God's were. . . . A rocking-chair empty in a shaft of dusty sunlight. . . . A browned and cracking photograph whose image muddled and disappeared behind tears. . . . . White curtains that shifted and blew in a morning breeze heavy with sunlight and bird-song. . . . And a delicate whisper, gentle and infinitely sad: Please God I want . . .

I pulled my hand away, but it was too late. I could hear them all now, their voices raised in discordant melancholy, their images like mirrors fractured in the sun:

pleasegodiwant . . .

My head hurt.

It took a long time to understand they weren't shouting at me. Longer still to realize they didn't know I was there. The Gypsies always knew when I was there. They asked only to be left to their dreams; but they sang their damned songs to taunt me, to haunt me, to drag me down out of the sunlight and into their dreams. . . .

"I'm sorry," I said. I didn't mean to say it. The words popped out of their own accord, and they wouldn't stop. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, i'm sorry i'm sorry i'msorryi'msorryi'msorry . . ." It mingled with the voices of the Earthers: *"I'm sorry please God I want I'm sorry please God I want i'msorrypleasegodiwant . . ."*

When I realized the end of both sentences, theirs and mine, was ". . . to be alive," I shut up. My head still hurt. I realized I was holding it, crouched in the sun-scented groundcover with both hands folded over the top of my head where under the scalp there was a metal plate to hold me together; and I let go and sat up.

The voices seemed quieter. There was still a prism effect of memories pushing and shoving at one another for space in my mind, but none of them were mine. None except Django, and he wasn't even here. He was somewhere in the asteroids, lost and dead because of a stupid accident that never should have happened; and I was here in green groundcover and yellow sunlight, listening to ghosts that

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weren't even real.

None of my ghosts were real. Very little of the pain I felt really belonged to me. Only the dull ache in my head and the tightness of unshed tears in my throat; the rest was shadows. Images. Imagination or empathy, the words didn't really matter. I wasn't alive in 1944. How could I feel Elliot Rendell's pain?

Nineteen forty-four. World War II. Elliot Rendell died there, among shattering bombs and shattered comrades, fighting a visible enemy for a comprehensible cause. If, in the middle of that battlefield, he had stubbed his toe on a rock, fallen into a puddle of rainwater, and drowned, maybe I'd have a right to feel his pain. That was damn near what happened to me.

Only it killed Django, not me. Django, one of the last few Romany in the asteroids. One of the last few heroes in the universe. Django with his gentle voice and his riverwater eyes and his sweet, clear smile for me. . . .

"Melacha?"

Michael's voice. It startled me. I turned and saw him poised at the graveyard gate, watching me.

"Melacha, are you all right?"

I was still half-caught in the memories. "Can you hear them?" I asked him, not even vaguely aware how the question might sound.

He hesitated, then passed the gate and walked with long, sure strides across the groundcover toward me. "Of course I can hear them," he said. There was a look in his eyes I didn't understand.

I watched him till he was standing beside me, looking down into my face with an odd half-smiling, half-questioning expression.

"Then, are they real?" I asked.

He sat down beside me. "Of course they're real," he said. Not just "yes"; not even "what do you mean"; but "of course."

I sighed, and rubbed my cheeks with the heels of my hands. They came away wet with tears. I looked at them. "I wasn't sure," I said.

He watched me for several moments. "What happened?"

I stared. "When?"

He eyed me almost curiously. "Whatever it was you didn't send me a chip about," he said. "Whatever it was that sent you running for Earth. Whatever it was that made you come out to the cemetery to listen to ghosts."

"He wasn't ready to die," I said, as if in answer.

"Nobody's ready to die," said Michael. "Haven't you been listening? Look at the birth and death dates. It doesn't matter if somebody lives two years or two hundred, death always comes too soon."

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"It was so stupid," I said.

"There's no smart way to die," he said. "Tell me, Melacha."

I told him. I didn't know how much he knew about shuttles or about the asteroids or about air filters; but I told him the whole pathetic, foolish story. The accident that could've happened in anybody's living room, only it happened on my shuttle and it killed my lover. And it was my fault. And you don't get a second chance, in space.

We had to make two docking procedures. People die every day in docking procedures, but we didn't.

We had to duck an unexpected flurry of "wild" rocks. People die every day in evasive actions from "wild rocks," but we didn't.

Django had survived, in his life, two holed chambers and two Insurrectionist battles. He had survived the rescue mission that brought the *Sunjammer* in at the cost of three people's lives. He had survived the *Big Eagle*'s fiasco flight.

He died on my shuttle of a clogged air filter that blew its top because I didn't check the tubes before the flight.

It was no particular comfort that I damn near died with him. "Damn near" is the operative phrase there. If I had died, I'd be out there singing with the Gypsies. But I didn't. I survived, and Django died. In just about the stupidest, most useless way any Belter ever did die, short of walking out of a chamber without a suit.

Michael listened without comment, all the way through to the end. Then, when he still didn't say anything, I told him about the ghosts. And the nightmares. I told him about the metal plate in my head and the shuttle I nearly wrecked when I heard the Gypsies. I told him about Elliot Rendell and Rebecca Gardener Rendell. I told him about all the ghosts of the asteroids; the workers and warriors, pilots and passengers, Gypsies and gentlemen.

Eventually I ran out of steam and came to a shuddering halt with the echoes of Gypsy songs in my ears. Michael just watched me, and we listened to the ghosts.

After a while he said, "People die every day."

I didn't look at him. "Why did you come out here?"

"Out where?"

"To the cemetery."

"I thought you might need me," he said.

I looked at him, then. But there were no answers in those shadowed eyes. "So you could tell me people die every day?" I asked, and was startled at the bitter sound of my voice.

To my surprise, he smiled. "Partly that," he said.

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"And?" I said. when he didn't go on.

"And to hold your hand," he said. "And to let you know you aren't alone. Other people listen to the ghosts. Everybody's guilty."

"Other people's ghosts are real," I said.

"No more real than yours," he said. "You have a right to your pain, Melacha. But you have a right to your life, as well. It's okay for you to be alive."

"You came out here to tell me *that?*"

If I thought he would defend himself from my bitterness, I was wrong. He just smiled again, and held my hand. And after a while, I realized that was enough. It was more than enough. It was a gift of greater proportions than I would have dared ask. The gift of acceptance.

I never did get used to living under a sky. I'm more comfortable in the asteroids, where life is carefully bounded by stone and steel and plastic and I know what the boundaries are, and how to behave.

But I learned to pilot a shuttle again, safely among the songs of Gypsies not everyone can hear. Sometimes I even sing with them. And when I'm dead, I'll join them. But not before.

SPINSTERS OF EARTH

They sit in their condominiums,
Quaint in their old-fashioned shorts,
Spinning designs in lucite
And reading the space-reports.

They gossip with smack or hashish
Of the girls in coveralls
Who lead the young men outward
To distant planet-falls.

"Those tramps, those witches," they murmur,
While plucking a greying hair,
"Imagine a well-bred woman
Willing to go *OUT THERE!*"

—Hope Athearn

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CHESS BY RAY & SMULL
by Martin Gardner

Another adventure set on the infamous spaceship Bagel . . .

Two young mathematicians in the computer shack of the spaceship Bagel, Ray and Smull, were enjoying a few hours of leisure by inventing unusual chess games to play with VOZ, the ship's computer.

"I've got a great idea," said Ray. "We'll ask VOZ to put the five black pieces—king, queen, bishop, knight and rook—on five randomly selected squares of the board. We'll tell him not to display the pieces on the screen, but only to star the five cells where he puts them. You and I will sit at two consoles and wear earphones so each of us can ask VOZ questions, but neither of us can hear what he says to the other."

"And so?" said Smull.

"Each question," Ray went on, "will be about any designated square of the board. We'll ask VOZ how many pieces are attacking that cell."

"Can we ask about a starred cell?"

"Certainly. Of course no piece attacks the cell it is on. If we ask about a starred cell, the answer can be 0,1,2,3 or 4. If we ask about an empty cell, it can be 0,1,2,3,4 or 5. Instead of asking how many pieces attack a cell, we can ask if a certain piece is on a certain cell. To such questions VOZ will answer yes or no."

"I think I can anticipate," said Smull. "VOZ will keep a record of the number of questions we each ask until we have determined the positions of all five pieces. Whoever asked the fewest number of questions is the winner."

"You've got it!" said Ray. "It's a sort of chessboard version of the old twentieth-century game of Master Mind."

The two men soon became fascinated by the game, even though VOZ complained that it was trivial and a big waste of his valuable time. In the course of their play they discovered a number of remarkable problems. For example, consider the computer display shown on the next page:

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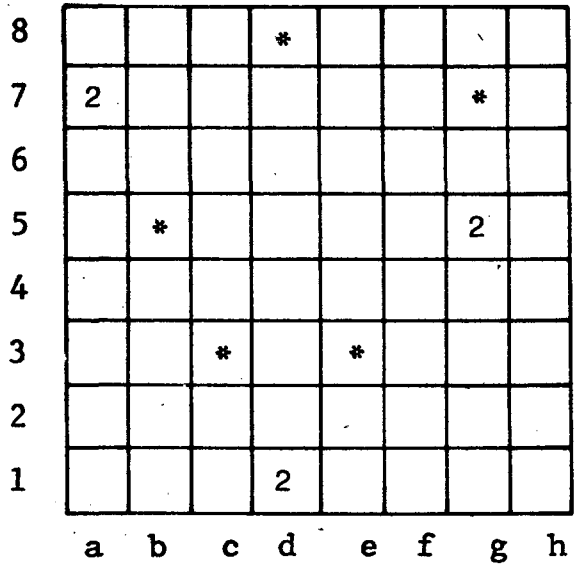
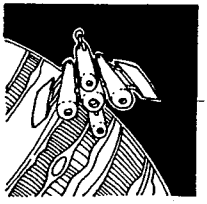


The five pieces are on the starred cells. VOZ has indicated that three other squares are each attacked by just two pieces. This information is all you need to determine which piece is on which starred cell. It's a fine exercise in chess logic. You are urged to try to solve it before checking the answer on page 66.



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ON NEAR-FUTURE SF FILMS

by Bill Warren
art: Marc Schirmeister

Mr. Warren writes widely on the SF scene in Hollywood; here is his preview for the next 12 to 18 months, TV and film.

As profits continue to roll in for science fiction films of all budgets and contents more and more will continue to be announced. Partly because extensive special effects call for larger budgets, SF films tend to be very big projects. To a degree, this is exciting: almost everyone enjoys elaborate, well-done special effects. But in the long run, this tendency could all too easily cause the end of the SF film boom.

If a few large-scale SF films are box office disasters, as statistics alone indicate will happen, producers are likely to decide that it is the genre that's not to be trusted, not the worth of the individual films. Most money men in Hollywood—which means, often, New York bankers—do not have any conception of the things that make science fiction popular, whether in films or in magazines like this one. They never liked the stuff—they don't really like movies—but for the time being they seem to be good investments.

Fortunately, most SF movies have been made by people who understand what SF can and cannot do in films. This Christmas, *Flash Gordon* will be released; it is probably the first big-budget SF film made by people who really do have no idea as to what it is they are working with. The film is heavily camp. I understand that, visually, the picture will be a real treat, but audiences resent spoofy treatment of science fiction these days, and the backlash could prove disastrous for *Flash Gordon*.

Nonetheless, the bubble has not burst yet; and dozens, perhaps hundreds, of science fiction and fantasy films lie in the immediate future. Some of these are in production now or are scheduled for production soon. Many may never be made. But it's interesting, as a consideration of possible trends, to look over and discuss some of these films.

ELLISON & ASIMOV & *I, ROBOT*

After the success at the box office of *Star Trek—The Motion Picture* and *The Black Hole*, then the stunning profits of *The Empire Strikes*

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Back, it's clear to all that the public is indeed still hungry for big-budget science fiction and fantasy films. So it's no wonder that Warner Bros. has given *I, Robot* the go-ahead.

This film, adapted by Harlan Ellison from the Isaac Asimov (who's he?) classic, will be directed by Irvin Kershner, if current plans continue. The producers will be Edward and Mildred Lewis.

Ellison modeled the structure of his script on that of Orson Welles's 1941 classic, *Citizen Kane*, which is a good model to follow for a movie that is basically a collection of short stories. *Kane*'s story was the investigation into a famous man's life following his death,

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conducted through a series of interviews with associates, triggering flashbacks. The tale of *I, Robot* as Ellison is adapting it follows an investigation into the past of Susan Calvin.

A film with a strong or unusual structure will often influence other movies. For instance, William Friedkin has admitted that he took much of the structure of *The Exorcist* from that of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Of course, copying the structure doesn't necessarily result in as good a film as the model.

The portions of the *I, Robot* script that Ellison has read to convention audiences sound excellent, certainly visually flamboyant. Although some feel that having Ellison adapt Asimov is akin to having Salvador Dali design airplanes, I suspect that the strengths of one writer will fit into the weaknesses of the other, the way jigsaw pieces fit together, to the benefit of both.

There is a problem I am afraid of, but it lies elsewhere. Although I liked *The Empire Strikes Back*, director Irvin Kershner showed little feeling for science fiction as a genre. He claims to like SF personally, but the weakest aspect of *Empire* was his direction. He works reasonably well with actors—almost all his movies are well-acted—and his camera is more fluid and intimate than was George Lucas's on *Star Wars*. However, I felt that Kershner handled the robots and other non-human characters in *Empire* unsatisfactorily, in that he doesn't seem to have cared about them *as* characters, merely as props. The script by Leigh Brackett and Lawrence Kasdan made C-3PO into a buttinsky; but Kershner did nothing to bail the droid out; and C-3PO emerges as being unpleasant and annoying, rather than the amusing fussbudget he was in *Star Wars*.

Perhaps Ellison's script will be basically director-proof, but perhaps not. He has said in interviews that there is no such thing as collaborative art (a proposition that, concerning movies, I soundly disagree with), so his script will almost certainly be very tight. But if it is not, Kershner could damage it. I would not want to see *I, Robot* come out on the level of Kershner's worst films, such as *A Fine Madness, The Eyes of Laura Mars*, or *The Flim-Flam Man*. In fairness to Kershner, he did not write those films and the main weaknesses did lie in the scripts.

Apparently now that Kershner has entered the realm of big-budget fantasy, he wants to continue in it. Not long ago, Michael Moorcock came to Los Angeles to work on a script then called *Lancelot*, which (not surprisingly) deals with Celtic mythology; this, too, would be directed by Kershner.

Ellison says that Kershner himself wants Harlan on the *I, Robot*

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project, despite some reluctance by the studio. Harlan is viewed as, in his own words, "a troublemaker" by Hollywood studio chiefs, especially after the outcome of a recent lawsuit in which Ellison and Ben Bova won a plagiarism suit against Paramount. (Their novella "Brillo" illegally became the TV movie and series "Future Cop," according to Ellison and Bova, who proved the case.)

However, I feel that the first movie made from a Harlan Ellison fantasy script will make tons of money, he'll immediately attain Most Favored Writer status, and there will be a flood of Ellison movies—if Kershner sticks to his guns and insists on Ellison's involvement. It is possible, of course, that Kershner will not be involved himself; he has just signed to direct *The Ninja* for release through 20th Century–Fox. and this may remove him from consideration as director on the Asimov-Ellison film. [Later information: Kershner signed, then Ellison's script was dropped.]

The producers of *I, Robot* are Edward and Mildred Lewis. Edward Lewis worked with director John Frankenheimer for many years, generally as producer on some of Frankenheimer's best pictures, including *Seven Days in May, Seconds, Grand Prix* and *I Walk the Line.* Lewis has shown himself to be a good producer and a man with taste. I have high hopes for *I, Robot.*

WARNER BROS. BIG ON FANTASY

The Ellison-Asimov film is only one of several big-budget fantastic pictures coming from Warner Bros. over the next several years. *Superman II* will be released in the United States in the summer of 1981, and *Superman III* begins production in early 1982. *Superman II* will be released in some areas of the world this Christmas, and in the British Isles at Easter. *Altered States* will be generally released in January, and *Outland* will be the May release from Warners for 1981.

While *Superman* was being filmed, director Richard Donner also shot many scenes for the sequel in interests of economy, but since the release of the first film, Donner has left the project and some alterations have been made in the storyline. The new material for *II* was directed by Richard Lester, who had also served as a kind of back-up on *Superman I.* Lester is erratic, but generally a fine director; some of his other films include *A Hard Day's Night, Help, Petulia, Juggernaut, The Three Musketeers, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum,* and *The Ritz.* He has shown himself to be a better director than Donner, so *Superman II* could prove to be very good.

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The most notable change in *Superman II*, or at least the most notorious, is that Marlon Brando will not be reappearing as Jor-El. Footage of Brando which was filmed but which will not be used includes scenes on Krypton with the three villains condemned to the Phantom Zone, plus more advice to his grown son while Jor-El is in the form of a (supposedly) computer-generated, Oz-like, giant head. These scenes have either been eliminated altogether or re-filmed with Susannah York again as Lara, Superman's mother, in place of Jor-El. The script of *Superman II* manages these changes quite neatly.

When I first heard of the overall storyline for *Superman I-II*, there were scenes of spectacular super-stunts that sounded just wonderful. General Zod (Terence Stamp), now on Earth, plucked up the Washington Monument and tossed it into the Pentagon like a dart into a target. Superman hoisted a battleship and swatted aside a flight of meteors. Alas, these scenes do not appear in *Superman II*, which is somewhat short on eyepopping spectacle.

The storyline of *II* is what you'd expect. Luthor breaks out of jail and sets out to destroy Superman. The three villains escape from the Phantom Zone (just how they do this has been changed several times) and head for Earth. Clark Kent and Lois Lane explore a tentative romantic relationship quite a ways further. Clark makes a fateful decision. The villains and Superman have a tremendous battle in downtown Metropolis. There's a showdown at the Fortress of Solitude.

The script is lively and full of good ideas, and since the film is being directed by Lester, always at his best when tackling a new subject, I suspect *Superman II* will be better than the first film.

I do have some reservations, however. The villains abruptly develop certain kinds of power that Superman has never had, and Superman himself shows some previously unknown abilities. I think that the addition of these scenes shows contempt for the mythology as built up in the comic books, and are also simply sloppy writing. However, it's possible that they will not be in the finished film; Sol Harrison of DC Comics told Warner Bros. representative Craig Miller that DC suggested several changes.

Another film coming from Warners is *Altered States*, which was directed by the flamboyant Ken Russell from a script by Paddy Chayefsky. But that isn't what the screen will say when the long-delayed movie is released in January. Chayefsky didn't like what was done to his script, and his name will not appear except as author of the original novel.

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But Chayefsky's novel was poor, and the script he wrote was only very slightly better. I don't know how much the finished film actually owes to Chayefsky's script, however; perhaps it has been changed for the better.

However, *Altered States* is a special effects extravaganza; the script certainly demanded that. The film is completely finished and ready for showing as I write (August), but is supposedly going to be re-edited. The storyline is somewhat similar to the 1950s film, *Monster on the Campus* (director Jack Arnold's worst SF film), in which a college professor devolves into a caveman now and then. *Altered States* is about an intense college researcher who devolves into a small apeman (makeup by Dick Smith) one night. And it's also about other things, including sensory deprivation tanks, drug use and abuse, and the power of Love to Conquer All.

The other major Warners SF film is *Outland*. Peter Hyams wrote and directed this picture as he did for *Capricorn One* and *Hanover Street,* which doesn't bode well for *Outland*. The new movie will star Sean Connery and Peter Boyle, in a story of a bitterly unpleasant mining colony on Io, one of the moons of Jupiter (but I didn't need to tell *you* that, did I?).

In an interview with Charles Champlin in the *Los Angeles Times,* Hyams said that there won't be any ray guns or spaceships in *Outland* (then how do the people get to Io?), and that "the mining colony is a location, not a subject." All the weaponry is conventional, not futuristic—which would seem to make it antiquated in the future time in which the story is set. "My idea is that the frontier is always hard, gritty, and unpleasant," Hyams told Champlin, "and the people who are building it are always looking over their shoulders rather than ahead, trying to stay alive and putting up with hell while they make some quick, big money."

The producer of *Outland* is Richard Roth, working for the Ladd Company, and it is the first production by this firm headed by Alan Ladd Jr. and other people formerly with 20th Century–Fox. *Outland*'s production designer is Philip Harrison, and the movie is being shot in London.

If Hyams is so determined to avoid the trappings of SF, if his story is simply another frontier drama, why give it a science fiction setting at all? Surely there's some plot reason why the story takes place on Io, rather than "Suez, or the Panama Canal, or [among] all the Chinese laborers laying the rails across the Rockies"? Which are Hyams's own descriptions of other frontier settings. He says, "This is space but it's the same thing, and the time is as near to today as

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it can be." Fine. So why set it in space?

That, by the way, is a rhetorical question. The answer is surely that he expects a film set in space with this storyline will be more likely to make a mint than one set during the construction of the Panama Canal.

The Ladd Co. has at least one other fantasy project underway. While Alan Ladd, Jr., was with 20th Century–Fox, he formed a good working relationship with George Lucas, and apparently Ladd was one of the main reasons that Fox handled the release of *Star Wars*. Ladd and Lucas have again formed a partnership, and together will produce *Twice Upon a Time,* a feature-length cartoon being written and directed by John Korty. Korty is probably best-known to SF and fantasy fans for having directed the TV movie of Zenna Henderson's *The People*.

1984 LIVES

Production will, SAG strike willing, begin in November on *Outlaw Zone*, a futuristic thriller written and directed by Sam Grossman. For the American Film Institute, Grossman already completed "A Date with Kris," a short version of the proposed feature. When shown at the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society last year, "A Date with Kris" was well-received.

"A Date with Kris" is a serious but witty tale of a repressed young man who, as part of tyrannical government's scheming, is led to fall in love with Kris, a young woman he has a "procreational date" with. The story, set in an unspecified future time, tells of his struggle to make his way across a polluted Hollywood to Kris's apartment. The film is a little slow but imaginative, especially considering the familiar setting.

For the feature film, to the basic story described above, Grossman has added the Outlaw Zone itself. On his way to meet Kris, Marty (the hero) meets with a mishap, and is rescued by "incursion commandos," and then taken to the Outlaw Zone in Pasadena, which is a "free society."

However, he still longs to meet Kris, and after a raid into Hollywood in search of her leads to disaster, the Hollywood authorities attack the Outlaw Zone. The battle forms the climax.

Scott Baio will play Marty. Baio is a pretty good but somewhat colorless young actor, best known for his role as Fonzie's cousin on the "Happy Days" TV series. He played the lead in *Bugsy Malone* and also appeared in *Foxes*. Barbara Bach will play "Sarge" in *Outlaw Zone* (a character not mentioned in the official synopsis). She's

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an exotic-looking brunette, made famous in the U.S. by playing the lead opposite Roger Moore in the James Bond film, *The Spy Who Loved Me.*

Harold Michelson will do the production design for Grossman's film, a position he also held on *Star Trek—The Motion Picture,* and for which he was nominated for an Oscar. He's a personable, intelligent man with a strong sense of humor and a career that goes back as far as DeMille's second *The Ten Commandments.*

Don Peterson of The Mothers of Invention is the scheduled composer, and Peter Shanaberg will produce *Outlaw Zone.* Shanaberg is head of Selluloid, a new promotion company.

In "A Date with Kris," Sam Grossman showed he has talent as a director, but it's possible he has less ability as a writer. That is, if one can judge from his one produced script, *The Visitor,* which was nothing less than abysmal. The young writer-director also made *The Van* (which he did not write alone), and that was a good teenage exploitation film, so perhaps the disaster of *The Visitor* was caused by other people.

JOHN'S OTHER SAYLES

Alligator was released in November. This monster film is based on that urban myth which seems to have been started by H. L. Gold, former editor of *Galaxy,* which has it that baby alligators flushed down toilets in New York have grown to mammoth proportions and secretly terrorize the sewer tunnels. In *Alligator,* the setting is the Midwest, and the film belongs in the science fiction category because growth hormones have made the alligator incredibly huge, but the basic idea is still the same. The model for the storyline, although credited to Frank Ray Perilli, is clearly *Jaws.* The movie is directed by Lewis Teague and written by John Sayles, one of the most promising young writers in Hollywood today (though he lives back East).

In a very short time, Sayles has turned out several interesting scripts, including *The Lady in Red, Piranha,* and *Battle Beyond the Stars.* The last-named was New World Pictures' big summer release, and was derived from Akira Kurosawa's classic, *The Seven Samurai/The Magnificent Seven.*

After Joe Dante passed over an earlier draft of his new film *The Howling,* John Sayles wrote the final film, due for release this winter by Avco Embassy. The script is intelligent, craftily written, with good dialogue and believable characters.

The Howling stars Dee Wallace, Patrick MacNee, John Carradine and others. It's a resurrection of a horror genre that hasn't been

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seen recently, but Avco doesn't want us to reveal just what it is, although the dreadful novel it is distantly related to was popular a few years ago. Joe Dante is a good director (he did *Piranha*), and the result will undoubtedly be well worth seeing. (My wife and I probably will appear as extras in it, and Forrest J Ackerman has a small speaking part.)

The special effects makeups for *The Howling* are by Rob Bottin, who did the same for *The Fog* and *Humanoids from the Deep*. The particular kind of monsters featured in *The Howling* have ordinarily been shown by lap dissolves involving makeup, but Bottin has a splendidly wacky plan of doing at least a couple of shots in live action, using hydraulics.

John Sayles wrote and directed the non-fantastic but very good *Return of The Secaucus Seven*. I've been told that when Steven Spielberg saw that film, he hired Sayles to write a new UFO film for Spielberg to produce. This will not be the announced sequel to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, but another film on the same topic. It is apparently the same film that Ron Cobb is co-writing; Cobb is also set to direct the film, if he ever finishes with his tasks on the long-delayed *Conan* project.

HAUNTED AIRLINE

In the past decade, Australian films have taken on world-wide importance, and several interesting fantastic films have emerged from Down Under. *Patrick* was an amusing and interesting variation on the usual ESP plot; *Thirst*, though it wasn't good, at least tried to come up with something new about vampires; *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is a haunting and beautiful mystery; *The Last Wave* is one of the best fantasy films in several years.

Soon after a 747 takes off from an international airport, it crashes, killing all aboard but one: the pilot, Keller. Haunted by guilt and confused about the reasons for the disaster, Keller works with the accident investigators trying to find the cause. Then, in the area where the plane went down, mysterious, perhaps supernatural, events begin to terrify the local townspeople. Keller is helped by a young woman strongly affected by these phenomena, but the influence of the dead passengers begins affecting Keller more and more strongly. This is the premise of *The Survivor*, a recently-completed Australian film.

It's about time that a modern style of supernatural mythology should begin to take shape. Many years ago, Fritz Leiber tried to do that with his short story "Smoke Ghost," and several of Stephen

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King's short stories are concerned with modern urban supernatural manifestations. But it's still largely untapped, although what there is that has been filmed seems almost entirely connected with aircraft.

For me, the premise of *The Survivor* is especially interesting, although many people resist this kind of present-day fantasy. For them, ghosts are things best found and left in ancient, creaking houses. But if there is any emotional validity to be found in ghost stories, they will have to be someday accepted as occurring not merely in the here and now, but in new kinds of places. Will we otherwise have to wait until our present becomes someone else's past?

David Hemmings directed *The Survivor*. Hemmings is already one of the best actors of his generation, and he's previously shown talent as a director. The stars include Robert Powell (the lead in TV's "Jesus of Nazareth"), who looks haunted when merely standing there; and Jenny Agutter, a good though bland actress who has been performing since she was a child. She's appeared in a wide range of films, including *The Railway Children*, *Walkabout*, and *Logan's Run*. Joseph Cotten also appears in *The Survivor*.

David Ambrose wrote the film from the novel by James Herbert. John Seale was the photographer, and William Fayman was the production designer.

MORE GORE FROM CANADA

David Cronenberg is an impressively-talented Canadian director with several popular films behind him. His *They Came from Within* was about an artificial venereal disease carried by slug-sized parasites which drove people insane and made them desperate for sex. *Rabid* was about a rabies-like disease transmitted by a woman with a new organ growing out of her armpit; she used it to drink other people's blood. *The Brood* dealt with psychosomatically-generated sexless offspring which were driven by their parents' rage to commit murders.

As you can see, Cronenberg does not have what could be called an ordinary imagination. He's a very efficient, intelligent director, but his stories all seem to derive from unpleasant medical or physical ideas. His newest picture, *Scanners*, is somewhat different. The film, which will be released in January by Avco-Embassy, is about people with artificially-induced ESP powers who are used as weapons by the government. As always in Cronenberg's films, this kind of meddling backfires, and this time heads begin exploding. The cast in-

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cludes Jennifer O'Neill, Stephen Lack, and Patrick McGoohan.

Perhaps inevitably, it's also been announced that David Cronenberg will write and direct a contemporary version of *Frankenstein*. He will make this for Filmplan International, a Canadian production company.

The same company will also produce *The Fright*, which will be directed by J. C. Lord (about whom I know nothing) from a script by Brian Taggert. Filmplan is also making a movie of David Morrell's novel *The Totem*.

PHILADELPHIA PLANS

George A. Romero put Philadelphia on the map as a film production center with *Night of the Living Dead*. He released the first of two planned sequels to that movie last year, and *Dawn of the Dead* was also a big hit. He's made several other films, at least one of which (*Martin*) was quite good. And he has plans, ambitious plans, for a series of movies, all of which will apparently be made in Philly.

He's just finishing a non-fantasy film about contemporary knights, and will follow that with a wild comedy called *Shoo Be Doo Be Moon*. The setting is the 1950s, and sex-starved artificial aliens invade a high school. There's also a teenage werewolf who becomes a football star. After that extravaganza, Romero plans to make at least two and probably three movies from scripts by Stephen King, including *Creepshow* and *The Stand*. And somewhere amidst all this will come the last of the Living Dead films, *Day of the Dead*, in which they finally take over altogether.

AND STILL THEY COME

The Inseminoid was recently finished in England. This British-Hong Kong co-production is about a monster aboard a spaceship. But it's not like *Alien*, no sir; this time, in a fever of originality, the monster is scheduled to burst out of a *woman*.

One of the most interesting and liveliest low budget horror SF films of the last few years was Don Coscarelli's *Phantasm*. It was exciting, funny, and scary—and it went like a bat out of hell. Asking for it all to mean something was ungenerous. Coscarelli will soon be starting *The Beastmaster* (no relation to Andre Norton's novel). The ad proclaims "out of the Mists of Time—a Legend of Ultimate Scope and Spectacle." The script is by Coscarelli and Paul Pepperman, who is also the producer.

Julie Corman purchased the rights to Isaac Asimov's "Nightfall" some time ago, and intends to star William Holden in the film

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version. A. E. Van Vogt has written a script for Golan & Globus (who have yet to make a good movie), *Star Riders*, which may star Klaus Kinski.

Twilight Travelers is an interesting-sounding European production (already completed), which has a plotline reminiscent of *Wild in the Streets*. This expensive, "ingeniously mounted" (according to *Variety*) futuristic story is set in a time when youth dominates and all over 50 are eliminated. Ugo Tognazzi, who is one of Italy's best actors, starred in and directed the film. It was a financial failure, however, so it isn't likely to be released here.

Milton Subotsky for years was partnered with Max J. Rosenberg in Amicus Productions, and together they made several inexpensive but reasonably good thrillers, including *The Skull, Tales from the Crypt, The Psychopath,* etc. Subotsky has now started his own company, Sword & Sorcery Productions. He's been so far unable to get financing for Lin Carter's *Thongor in the Valley of the Demons*, but completed a handsome but tedious psycho-horror thriller, *Dominique*, some time ago. That starred Cliff Robertson.

Subotsky has just completed *The Monster Club*, which brings Vincent Price back to horror movies. I'll bet you thought he was never away. The cast also includes Donald Pleasence, Stuart Whitman, John Carradine, Barbara Kellermann, Simon Ward, Patrick Magee, and Richard Johnson (who seems to be in most horror movies made in Europe). The director was the often-good Roy Ward Baker.

Evilspeak—a computer used to conjure up demons; producer-director Eric Weston is making it from a script by Joseph Garofalo.

Just Before Dawn—"a story of survival" will be written and directed by Jeff Lieberman for Picturemedia Ltd.

Supermonster—the return of the jet-propelled turtle, Gamera.

Star Godzilla—the return of guess who.

The Cat People—the famous horror story of the 1940s will be remade by Paul Schrader.

The Creature from the Black Lagoon—the famous horror story of the 1950s, to be remade by John (*The Blues Brothers*) Landis, acting as producer.

Jolly Roger, Son of the Crimson Pirate—a sequel to the wonderful spoof swashbuckler, to be made by Burt Lancaster.

The Girl and the Tiger—a beast from the future menaces a beautiful girl. From material written by Douglas Baker.

Dawn of the Mummy—a walking mummy kills with plenty of gore. Directed by Armand Weston from Daria Price's script.

Inferno—horror story set in New York; written and directed by

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Dario (*Suspiria*) Argento. Music by Keith Emerson.

Simulation—Italian SF film with a large budget, from producer Fulvio Morsella.

Gnomes—Italian horror set in San Francisco, from director Ovidio Assonitis. He was responsible for *Tentacles* and *The Visitor*.

Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Hyde—from Larry (*Zontar*) Buchanan.

Dolphin Island—Arthur C. Clarke's novel to be made by producer Robert B. (*Sounder*) Radnitz.

Divorce Vampire Style—the sequel to *Love at First Bite*.

The Demolished Man—Alfred Bester's novel adapted by Oliver (*Midnight Express*) Stone.

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The Glow—directed by David Giler for Warner Bros.

The Monster of Loch Ness—directed by Ken Russell.

Ultimate Weapon—written and directed by Dan O'Bannon.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice—written and directed by Dan O'Bannon, produced by Ibrahim Moussa. Cowriter, Don Jakoby. Modern-day Arabian Nights.

Player Piano—Kurt Vonnegut's early novel, written and directed by Alan Arkin, who will also star. For Pressman Productions.

Trelnor the Wanderer—Avco-Embassy wants Mark Hamill for the title role; Orson Welles and John Huston sought for other parts in this large-budgeted film.

Escape from New York—Lee Van Cleef and Kurt Russell star in John Carpenter's future-prison thriller. Now shooting.

An American Werewolf in London—John Landis is writing and directing this horror movie that isn't quite a comedy.

Monster Island—A Spanish film from a novel by Jules Verne, perhaps *Mysterious Island*. Starring Peter Cushing.

And for all of you who love to see new titles: *Pumaman, Island of the Zombies, Island of the Fishmen, Fascination, Cannibal Terror, The Gendarme and the Aliens, The Gendarme and the Revenge of the Aliens, The Dawn of Time, Cavemen, Deadly Species, The Micro Men, Moebius Man, The Rats, Spacecoach, Spaceport, Star Flight One, Star Fox, Two Guys from Space, Vampire Agent, When You're a Werewolf.*

All of these titles are worth reporting, even those on which I have little or no information. A listing like this in a major SF magazine is highly unusual; such lists are generally found only in magazines specializing in horror and SF movies. But about once a year, such a list is extremely useful, for it shows the extent and style of fantastic film production, even if some of the titles will never be made.

Certain trends are obvious. For instance, it seems apparent now that most producers of low-budget films realize that they cannot really compete in terms of special effects and production values with movies costing more than $10 million, which is about the lowest possible budget for something elaborate. That's why there are fewer space and similar films during this boom period than there were in the mini-boom following *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Some intelligent American producers, such as Ashley Grayson, have decided to film space properties which have very strong stories and which require a relative minimum of special effects. Grayson himself plans to film *Starhunt*, adapted from David Gerrold's novel *Yesterday's Children* by the author. The plot has elements of *Star*

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Trek as well as a 1950s submarine-vs.-warship movie, *The Enemy Below*. The property sounds quite promising, and I hope to report more on its progress in the future.

Low-budget European producers frequently seize on an international trend and wear it out at once with a flood of cheap, imitative and interchangeable tripe. They even invented two trends of their own in Italy, the muscleman epics and the spaghetti westerns, and destroyed them just as rapidly. They also pounced on the spy wave, and there were dozens of imitations of James Bond. After *2001,* there was a brief surge of films like *Wild Wild Planet,* but these died out fast. And after *Star Wars,* there were several minor SF films, most of which did not get released in the United States.

Now, however, there's a pair of new, inexpensive models for them to follow: *Halloween* and *Dawn of the Dead.* These imitative producers are avoiding elaborate space films which may mean that the space movie trend will last somewhat longer than it would have if a string of Italian sausages hit the world's screens.

But where are the new movies then coming from? I'm constantly asked by science fiction readers why SF movies almost never touch the classic material. Why are there so few Heinlein movies (can you name *both* of them?), almost nothing from Van Vogt, or Larry Niven, or Frederik Pohl, or Philip K. Dick (though one of his *is* planned), and so forth. A film is being made that's based on a John Varley short story, but that's a rare exception.

The answer to this question is obvious and logical—to movie producers, at least.

Look at the biggest SF boxoffice successes: *Star Wars, Close Encounters, Star Trek, The Black Hole, The Empire Strikes Back.* All of these, without exception, are original (well, sort of) screenplays. Other producers considering filming science fiction look at the financial successes of these films, and at the backgrounds of the people involved. They don't see SF stories and novels as source material; they don't see SF writers participating. Instead, they see moviemakers more or less just like themselves.

Furthermore, many classic SF novels simply could not be adapted very effectively to movies. They'd have to be huge epics, and also would have to be pared down. Why bother to buy a novel when you can write a story that's "just as good" and fills your needs better?

Remember also that the cardinal rule of Hollywood today is that everyone wants to be first to be second. That is, because of the enormous budgets of these pictures, studios take huge financial risks. And most producers are afraid of taking any chances at

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all—most movies of any sort are presold propositions (hopefully). Brave producers establish trends, beachheads, and the rest of Hollywood follows. To buy a known but not best-selling novel is already an uncertain expense. In strictly financial terms, why should they buy *Ringworld* from Larry Niven, when they can hire a writer to create something a lot like *Star Wars*? Perhaps even a writer who has already written a successful film?

Consider Irvin Kershner. If he had not directed *The Empire Strikes Back*, it is unlikely he would have been approached to direct a major SF project like *I, Robot*. Nothing in his previous career gave any indication that he would be suitable for a film like that. But Warner Bros. evidently felt it necessary to hedge their bets wherever possible; even if Kershner's abilities seem somewhat unsuited

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to *I, Robot,* his fame from *Empire* would probably help at the box-office.

But as far as getting classic SF novels on the screen, *I, Robot* alone could prove to be the turning point. The Lewises are establishing a beachhead. If it is made and is a big hit, and even this early I suspect it will be, producers will fall all over themselves trying to be the first to be second once again—to be the first to be second to hire Harlan Ellison to write their movies, to acquire Asimov stories, and finally to grab other classic science fiction material.

And if that happens, the dam will burst. And finally, all those wonderfully cinematic stories we've loved for years, finally—they will be filmed. But unless someone actually does film a classic piece of science fiction *and* makes a profit, it will never happen.

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NEW PEOPLE

by R.A. Lafferty

art: Stephen Fabian

Mr. Lafferty worked at the respectable trade of electrical engineer for some thirty-five years; he didn't take up writing and selling SF until he was 46 years old. Not all his stories are as strange as this one, but then, some are even more so.

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1.

Mind-enhancing and strength-enhancing substances had been used for a dozen years. Their effect was remarkable and even spectacular, and often the effect on a person was permanent. But the substances themselves had not been isolated. They were come by only in unsuspecting and unpredictable combinations. And yet it was the 'new' or enhanced people who, every year, came to the fore and became the leaders of the world in almost every field.

This year, many of the new and enhanced people were common, not at all distinguished or elegant in their persons; and this became rather painful. They could not be ignored. The 'new' people, despite their failings, were the people who mattered. There is no denying that the present year has more of the powerful new people than usual, and that they are more than usually vulgar.

Well, there was Lenny 'Toadskin' Leim. He reported to a midwestern university as a freshman in February of this year, and he was a walk-on in track and field. In the field of athletics where charisma counts for so much, he didn't have any of it at all. But he could high-jump nine feet and nine inches. That was two feet higher than any human had ever jumped before. But he was a slight man with nothing impressive about him except his ability to skim through all the texts and lectures of a difficult course in one hour and then pass an examination in that course with a full A.

And there was Sven Singleton, who could throw anything further than it had ever been thrown before: the hammer, the javelin, the shot-put, the discus. He hadn't any style, and he was a rather short-armed, lean man with no particular 'swing' to him, but he could throw all those things. "How far must I throw it for a record today?" he'd ask whenever he came up to the mark for any of them. He didn't believe in breaking a record by too much. There would always be tomorrow for that. He also threw the baseball (one thousand and one feet) and the football (one hundred and thirty-three yards) farther than it had been thrown before.

There was Bob Bunchy, who broke most of the weightlifting marks for the eight different classes. He was a small man, but he outlifted the heavyweights and super-heavyweights also. His records couldn't be disputed, but the strongest man in the world should have come on a little bit stronger in his person.

Elton Spree did the hundred yards in 7.9 seconds, and his sister Audrey Spree did the mile in 3:03. In the autumn of this year, Jimmy Joe Jimson began to run through everybody on the football

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field. As of now, after six games, he still has not been tackled. He is averaging a little more than five hundred yards a game, and he is always taken out after he has carried the ball ten times. And Billy John Bilberry at Alabama, Randy Andy Anderson at Oklahoma, and Circus Charley Crump at Arkansas are all about as good. Circus Charley was tackled once this year, in the third game of the season, but that was only because he was showing off too much and got tangled up in his own feet.

All of these athletes, and a hundred other new and prominent ones, were slobs to some degree; or at least they were commoners. But all of them were mental giants as well as physical phenomena. Each of them, except Sven Singleton, had written a meaningful and monumental work of philosophy, and those works remain meaningful even after nine or ten months have passed.

And as to the true intellectual giants among the 'new people' of the present year! Casey Yantra, August Tooms, Joyful John Tolliver (so he's the greatest physicist in the world and he goes around barefoot, in faded blue overalls, and shirtless, but he's hairy enough not to need a shirt except for appearance), Ivan Tottlebeam, Jessica Wigtown (how we are blessed with talent this year!), John King-Stephen, Henry Saxo, Rafael Ricardo (the 'Big Think' had finally arrived with Ricardo), Caroline Yap, Efram Rickets, Demetrio Garcia, Sulky-Jane Surrey, Tom Benbolt, Terrance Tripuill! Since the beginning of the world there had never been such a bunch of extraordinary minds appearing in a single year, and this was in only half of the world. In the other half of the world there was only the relentless excellence that might have been predicted, not this sensational excellence that almost exploded in what used to be called the 'New World.'

2.

Mother Maderos (her real name was Conchita Anita Maderos) was being advocatorily interviewed (about the chili powder on which she held copyright) by an Investigative Reporter and a Federal Person traveling together, as had become the custom.

IR: "Mother Maderos, we must know exactly what you put into your Mother Maderos Dawn Chili Powder. I said that we must know *exactly* what you put into it, not approximately."

MM: "I heard you said it, punk. But I am not an exactly person. I am an approximately person. I say there is only an approximately

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formula for what goes into the chili powder. It is never the same for two different batches. Besides, it is none of your affair what is in my chili powder. It is the other one there who is the federal person and he can ask questions. You are the nothing person."

IR: "You may just have talked yourself into a prison sentence, Mother Maderos. The word of any investigative reporter is law to any federal person. They could not, or would not, conduct any meaningful investigation at all without us. Tell her that our word is law with all federal persons, Clyde. Explain it to her. No, you wouldn't be able to do that. Just say 'That's right' to whatever I say, and say it resoundingly."

FP: " 'That's right' isn't one of the phrases in our repertoire. The closest thing to 'that's right' in our repertoire is 'right on'."

IR: "Say it, Clyde, say it resoundingly."

FP: "Right on!!!"

MM: "Oh, I see. Well, my chili powder is made up entirely of additives. The one thing that the 'Mother Maderos Dawn Chili Powder' does *not* contain is chili powder itself. All my franchised outlets (actually I have only one franchised outlet: 'Crum Bums Junk Food Emporiums,' but there are one hundred locations in their system), all of them start with standard Arizona Greaseless Chili. My powder contains Prusopis Fuliflora (Mesquite), Apion Sayi (the corn weevil; sure they're alive, but they're small as the powder), ground-up rhizome of the Helleborus Foetidus or bear's-foot plant. And androsterone, of course. And chili wouldn't be chili without Lophophora Williamsii (Peyote Cactus buds) and the Psilocybe Mexicana Mushroom. And Bufotenine (Ah, Bufotenine!) (from the skin of toads, and also from banana peels). Bufotenine was the active element in most of the witches' brews, you know."

IR: "*Are* you a witch, Mother Maderos?"

MM: "Sort of, but don't advertise it. I'm also head of the Saint Cecelia Circle of the Altar Society at the Parish. That's the main things I put into my powder. The others are impulse put-ins, never the same twice. Oh yes, I do put a little bit of nitro-glycerin in each batch. I figure that a lot of people have bad hearts and my nitroglycerin probably saves countless lives every day. And I put in estrone to make people feel good. I hardly ever put Spanish Fly in my powder lately. You can go to jail for using that stuff."

IR: "I wouldn't worry about that detail, Mother Maderos. You can already go to jail a dozen times for using what you have admitted using. Anything else?"

MM: "Yeah, I put a little bit of 'smart stuff root' and a little bit

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of 'strong stuff root' in it. I figure that people can't be too smart or too strong. Those two are code names. They won't mean anything to you. They stand the world on its nose but they won't mean anything to you."

IR: "Mother Maderos, you are hereby enjoined from manufacturing or selling any more of this powder. The items are all dangerous and illegal, all of them that I understand. Formal charges will be filed against you within twelve hours; and, pending that, you will probably be taken into custody within an hour. If you have any arrangements to make, make them quickly. You will be going away for a long time."

MM: "I'll just ship the carload of the stuff that I have on the siding to my main distribution point. Then I'll think about it, whether I want to change the powder or stay with it the way it is. Oh, it's no trouble. All my railway cars are self-propelled."

IR: "You will not ship *anything anywhere!* Almost all the items you have named are carcinogenous to black-foot weasels."

MM: "Whatever happened to rats? You'll enjoin me to nothing. You are the nothing person. Let the tongue-tied federal person here do the enjoining if anybody does." This Conchita Maderos then went to the window, put two fingers in her mouth, and whistled a very piercing and loud whistle.

IR: "Back me up, Clyde, back me up. Say one of the phrases in your repertoire."

FP: "Right on!!!" From outdoors, and about a kilometer away, there came a very loud and piercing whistle in answer to the whistle that Conchita Maderos had given. This was followed by a roar and a rumble, a self-propelled rumble.

FP: "It's rolling, is it?"

MM: "Yeah, Clyde, that last carload of stuff is rolling. But I'm not sure about the subsequent ones. That might be the subsequentest one there is."

IR: "What, what, what? What is all this mouthy talk? As I said, Mother Maderos, if you have any arrangements to make, make them quickly. You will be going away for a long time."

And just what is all this business about the 'Mother Maderos Dawn Chili' doing in the middle of this account?

Oh, I have just received a registered mailing from the Criminal Enforcement Division of the Government. It is sent to all the Junk Food dealers in the country, it says. It quotes the foregoing little interview as evidence, and it states that this must be displayed in

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a prominent place as a warning against the Dawn Chili Powder. Failure to display this prominently can result in a prison sentence from any derelict Junk Food dealer.

I have no prominent place to display it, but maybe this will do. I am not a Junk Food dealer, but the Criminal Enforcement Division of the Government must believe that I am or they would not have sent this missive to me by registered mail. It is safest to insert this here.

3.

Terrance Tripuill is the world's smartest geologist and geocosmologist, and he has been so for most of this year. Oh, there is no doubt that he is the smartest. He arrived on the scene like a continental upheaval, with the rocks gushing like water and a brimstone smell upon everything. He brought new theory and facts to isothermics. He unraveled the secret of the trilobite Isotelus. Nobody else had even thought to ask why a new trilobite had been needed in its particular era. And the answer that Terrance gave to that question left the people shaking who really understood the trilobite situation.

—Nobody knew more about Florissant Lake Beds than did Terrance Tripuill. Nor about the Flaming Gorge, nor about Devonian Orogeny generally. Nor about the Sundance Sea, or the Sinbad Limestone, or Neogeratorus. If it had anything to do with the Earth, Terrance knew all about it.

Terrance, a lumbering giant, was a sober and sedate man. He wasn't as bizarre as most of the sudden new geniuses of this year, though some of their oddities have rubbed off onto him now. Besides wearing at all hours and seasons and functions a hunting jacket with all the pockets filled with shot-gun shells (no, that was only a drollery of his to say that they were shot-gun shells; they were really blasting caps), his only eccentricity was carrying around a bowling ball with him always. The bowling ball had a world map contoured upon it, and the three holes at the top of it had interesting counterparts on the surface of the Earth itself. For, just at these three corresponding locations, Terrance had begun three great excavations into the earth, one of them near Alta in Norway (70°N, 23°E); one of them near Kazachye in Siberia (70°N, 142°E), just where the Cherskiy range of mountains had somehow been gobbled up; and the third of them on Cornwalis Island in the Northwest

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Territories of Canada (99°E, 75°N). This latter was called the thumbhole by Terrance.

The theory of Terrance (get ready for it, it's in the style of the new "loose theory" outpouring of this year) was that three very great holes in the Earth, each about two hundred miles in diameter and nine hundred miles deep, had been filled up artificially, by men, or by the giants who were before men. Terrance Tripuill was a great fund-raiser, and he was determined to find out *why* those three big holes had been filled up. They were filled with such masses of rubble that whole ranges of mountains had been demolished to obtain the filling material. After seven months of digging, the deepest emptying (about sixty-five miles deep, at the Cornwalis Island site) still showed artificial fill of rocks that were the remnants of mountains blasted apart.

"There is something waking up down at the bottom of that hole," Terrance declared on one of his fund-raising tours. "I have been logging its brain waves (would you believe brain waves a mile long?). It's been a prisoner down there for between seven and nine million years. I am pretty sure that there is one of these creatures at the bottom of each of the three holes. People, we must solve this at all costs. It is the biggest skeleton ever to be hidden in any three closets. A creature that is seven to nine million years old is *old*. A creature that is two hundred miles in diameter is *big*. People, this is no little project that we are engaged on. This is 'Big Study' stuff."

There were people who believed that the big creature should not be released, that it or they were imprisoned and buried for a reason. But if a thing was *that big,* the new feeling was to go ahead with it. No new scientist of any other recent year had got hold of such a 'Big Concept' project as Terrance Tripuill had got hold of here. Consider him, and get an idea of the really big things that are on the move right now, the big new things that are not always as neat as the new things of other years. Should the present year not be named 'The Year of the Big Concept'?

But it has been Rafael (The Big Think) Ricardo who has really brought the present year where it might be called 'The Amazement of the Ages.' The other spectacular new scientists have big concepts and big enterprises, but they do not really have the 'View From a Distant Mountain.' The 'Distant Mountain,' somewhere out in the orbit of Neptune, gave the 'Big View' as well as the 'Big Think' to Ricardo who was able to locate himself mentally in that place. It gave him peculiar insights and far-out-sights into all the jumping

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new theories, those of Casey Yantra, August Toombs, Joyful John Tolliver, Ivan Tottlebeam, Jessica Wigtown, John King-Stephen, Henry Saxo, Caroline Yap, Efram Rickets, Demetrio Garcia, Sulkey-Jane Surrey, Tom Benbolt, Terrance Tripuill, all the great ones. "A year that can't see itself properly on the outside has still a long ways to go on its exterior construction," Ricardo used to say as he zoomed along on his skate-board.

On the project that was popularly called 'The Three Holes of Terrance Tripuill,' Ricardo had some penetrating 'distant mountain' views. "No, of course there aren't any big creatures buried alive at the bottoms of those three holes," he said. "That's the silliest thing I ever heard of. Our trouble is that we are all too close to the Earth to see what it is really like. It is an artificial ball set into a natural sequence of planets orbiting a natural sun. Terrance Tripuill is forever carrying a bowling ball around with him, even to bed (his wife tells me that it is from the bowling ball that she got that broken clavicle, and her insurance didn't cover 'a bowling accident in bed'), and yet he hasn't tumbled to the fact that he has been living on a bowling ball all his life. His unconscious understands it, yes, but his consciousness does not.

"Some demiurge once set it, the bowling-ball Earth, into a sequence of orbiting planets for a joke. It did look like a planet orbiting there, and his companions laughed with him at the place he had parked it.

"But some of the fauna of the bowling ball named Earth developed and came to understand the situation. They filled up the three finger holes of the bowling ball with rubble from a few mountain ranges that they had to demolish. When that demiurge is ready to go bowling again (though a day with them is as a million years with us, yet it's been more than a cosmic week since he set it here, so he might come for it at any time) he won't be able to pick the bowling ball up out of its orbit. He'll find that the finger holes are filled up. That might give our artificial planet a reprieve for a while (an instant with the demiurge while he had to grasp the ball with both hands might be as ten thousand years with us). The decision to fill up the three holes was a good one, no matter whose decision it was."

Was there ever as intellectual a year as this one? Well, do you yourself not sleep better at night knowing that the 'Big Think' is present among us?

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4.

Six Investigative Reporters were sitting very late one night over the walnuts and the wine. They were talking about the one thing that they had all been basically investigating all year. The six of them (Interrogative Reporters, though they are gad-flies upon the Earth, are not bad people when they get together by themselves) were Tim Dall, Eileen Keeghan, Harold Fame, Maximillan Lombardy, Janus Funk, and Roxie Campollion. The one thing they were always thinking and talking about (while they pursued lesser stories to make a living) was the appearance of the exceptional 'new people' this year, so much more talented than the new people of other recent years, so much more loutish and slobbish than the leading new people of other years. And they had about worn out the night with anecdotes of the incongruities of these 'new people.'

One of these Investigative Reporters, Tim Dall, had always been the least esteemed of the group. But now, suddenly and in a way not understood, he had himself *become* one of the new people. That made a difference.

And, this was connected with his having become a 'new person,' he could crack walnuts between his thumb and forefinger now. Of course these were Black Walnuts. This group wasn't, at least, the sort of people who used English Walnuts.

"Yes, you have become one of the 'New People' geniuses, Tim," Roxie Campollion said. "We realize that you have suddenly become preternaturally strong and spacious and intelligent. And yet you're as common as you ever were. You are, in fact, the only common one of us. Why oh why should the bird lay the golden egg on the top of your noggin and not on the noggin of any other of us? It's damned unfair. Special blessings should not come to persons who can't handle them elegantly." Roxie was a little bit sour when she thought about this.

"The 'new people' geniuses, of this year most especially, are pretty crass. They're the sort of folks who wear turtle-neck sweaters and eat liver-and-onions," Janus Funk said in disgust. "You qualify for that, Tim. Ah, I'm under a vow never to retire for the night until the first hint of the dawn appears in the sky. I hope it doesn't keep me waiting too long this morning."

"The aliens have landed," Eileen Keeghan moaned. "One or two of them have been landing spectacularly every day this year. And they are all so common and so cruddy that they make the rest of us seem, by contrast, to be exciting and more than a little bit alienish

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ourselves. These new arrivals do not really have the 'touch of strange', for that is always accompanied by a 'touch of elegance.' Oh yes, they all arrive with the door-splitting power of both mind and body. We will not accept them. Well, what *will* we do with them then? They're the sort of people who drive orange automobiles and wear apple-blossom scent in July." Eileen wrote a daily newspaper column titled 'Kit Fox Droppings.' It was very elegant, as was she. "Doesn't the time drag between four and four-thirty in the morning though!"

"The aliens have *not* landed," Harold Fame said. "Examine any one of the brilliant 'new people' and he will have been around for as long as you want to check back on him, been around as a tedious and unbrilliant fixture, with his pockets empty and his welcome everlastingly worn out. But what carrion have they now eaten that they have become so great? I believe that they've struck the 'mother lode' this year, though without realizing it. For a dozen years, intelligence-enhancing substances have been placer-mined out of the flow and pharmacopoeia of our world; but always they have been greatly diluted and their real sources have remained unknown. But they've tapped the 'mother lode' this year. Oh, why can't we all find it out and tap it? This year's 'new people,' they're the sort who would casually toss their jacket over their *right* shoulder when strolling on a chill-sunny day, the sort of people who use Syrian almonds and New Jersey holland onions."

"I never did understand about the 'new people'," Tim Dall said, "but yesterday morning, quite early, I discovered that I had *become* one of the 'new people.' It would seem that, having become one of them, I would be able to understand and explain them better, but such is not the case. I still do not at all understand these powerful new people, not even the powerful new person that I have become. But this 'mother lode,' you call it, Harold, I should be able to identify it. And there is a glimmer of it at the back door of my mind right now."

"Ah, the night does drag," Maximillian Lombardy complained. "Until this year I could gather with other Investigative Reporters and believe that I was just possibly in the most elite and most intellectual company in the world. This year, I can no longer maintain that fiction. The 'new people' louts are more intellectual than we are, and that makes them more elite than we are. Oh, why should it come to them and not to ourselves! They are the sort of people who—Oh, words fail me!—they are the sort of people who would eat chili for breakfast."

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"That's it!" Tim Dall cried. "Let's all go have chili for breakfast. I believe that it's important."

"It's too early even for a chili breakfast, isn't it?" Roxie asked, not quite warming to the idea.

"Not for *'Mother Maderos Dawn Chili'* available at your nearest Crum Bums Junk Food Emporium. Let's go!"

5.

"Six Dawn Chilis!" Tim Dall ordered as he and his friends took one of those sociable six-sided tables in Crum Bums North-Side Junk Food Emporium.

"We have other chilis," the waitress said. "Mother Maderos Dawn Chili isn't for everyone."

"But it is for us," Roxie declared. "How is it different?"

"It makes you smart and it makes you strong," the waitress said. "I say about those who can't stand the taste of Dawn Chili, 'Well and good, it keeps things from getting too crowded.' But there are disadvantages." Yes, she had already served the six Dawn Chilis to them quickly. "Since it's changed me, I keep breaking all my husband's ribs whenever we rough-house wrestle the way we like to. I have to be careful not to break him, and not to break other things too. And my mind is so active now that it keeps me on the go all the time. And besides, I've made so much money just by latching onto those obvious opportunities that I'm almost buried under it."

"Ow!" Roxie cried, "and then Ow on the other side. It's as if long and pointed ears just came out of me. Getting smart fast isn't painless. Oh yes, I'm enhanced, and I only had three spoonfuls of the stuff. Why do you still work here, dear, if you are covered up with money now?"

"For the people. I couldn't get along without them. Even before I was changed, the first time I walked into Crum Bums (this one opened last May), I said, 'This is for me.' These are the kind of people that—"

"—that drive orange-colored automobiles and wear apple-blossom scent in July," Eileen Keeghan chirped with her sour bird song, "the sort of people who wear turtle-necked sweaters and eat liver-and-onions (when they're not eating Dawn Chili), the kind of people who casually toss their jackets over their *right* shoulders. Ugh, and ugh cubed."

"You're onto us, sis," the waitress said. "Aren't slobs wonderful!

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I'm glad that the change hasn't changed me."

"But it hasn't run clear wild," Janus Funk questioned it, "though I myself have just become one of the New People. What will limit the effect?"

"Oh, this is the last week that we'll have Mother Maderos Dawn Chili," the girl said. "There's a writ out against it, so she's not making any more of her chili powder for a while. It's technically a government writ, but it's really Compensating Fate intervening before things get clear out of hand. Oh, the 'smart stuff root' and the 'strong stuff root' (they're code names only) will still be used in something or other, but by fewer people and in lesser strength. This year almost got out of hand."

"I don't feel any pointed ears coming out on me exactly," Maximillian Lombardy laughed, "but I sure am crowded to bursting with long and pointed thoughts. Ah, I'm going to like this."

"I give it up!" Eileen spat in disgust. "I was always smart enough, and I refuse to become gross. I'll blow the lid off this thing!" And she rattled out of Crum Bums North-Side place angrily (she always wore a lot of wooden bracelets and anklets; they accounted for the rattling).

"She wouldn't even know where to find the lid," the waitress laughed, "but she'll probably create a few hot pellets. I read her column 'Kit Fox Droppings' in the paper. Ah, we have a sort of organization to keep things in hand. We call it the 'Committee of One Million to Keep it Quiet,' though it has about five million members now. You all may as well join. The idea is—"

"—that it's fun to be super-smart and super-strong," Roxie took it up, "but it's the most fun when you keep it quiet and enjoy it privately without upsetting the money cart or the academic wagon."

"That's it," the waitress said. "You all may as well have a couple more bowls. The fun of this is that the joys can only come to the right people, those who ate chili for breakfast anyhow. Giving up Dawn Chili doesn't mean that we will be giving up chili."

"Ah, I wonder what the 'New People' of the coming year will be like?" Janus Funk mused, "and what will their gadget be?"

"I hope it's a little bit more subtle next year, whatever it is," Harold Flame said. "I worry. Is it really *smart* to become as smart as we have just become?"

But, really, will things be as uniquely 'new' with the New People of next year?

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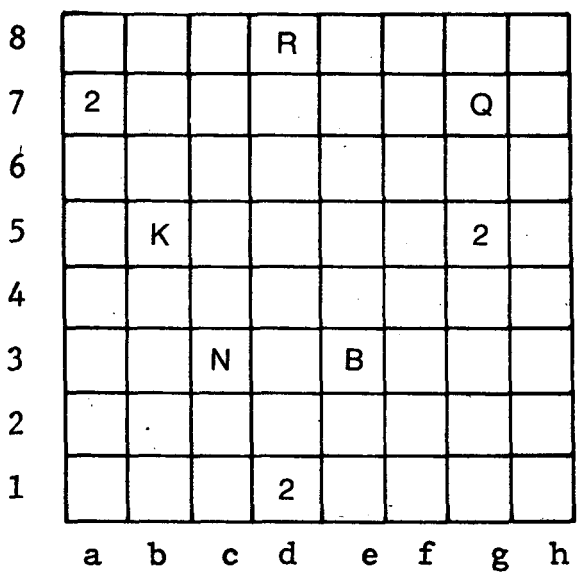
SOLUTION TO CHESS BY RAY AND SMULL (from page 36)

The piece on d8 must be either a queen or rook, otherwise c3 and e3 would both have to hold knights that attack d1. Since there is only one knight on the board, d1 must be attacked by a queen or rook on d8.

The knight must be on c3. If it were on e3 there would be no way that two pieces could attack a7. The piece on e3, in order to attack a7, must be a queen or bishop. If a queen, then the rook must be on d8, and no piece is available to go on g7 that can attack a7. Therefore e3 must hold the bishop. Note that the bishop is now attacking g5.

The piece on g7 must be the rook or queen because it must attack both a7 and g5. It can't be the rook, because that would put the queen on d8 and we would have three pieces, not two, attacking g5. Therefore the queen is on g7, the rook on d8, leaving the king to go on b5.

The picture below shows the unique solution:



After playing the game for several weeks, Ray and Smull decided to make the game harder by telling VOZ not to indicate the positions of the five pieces. Otherwise, the game was played as before.

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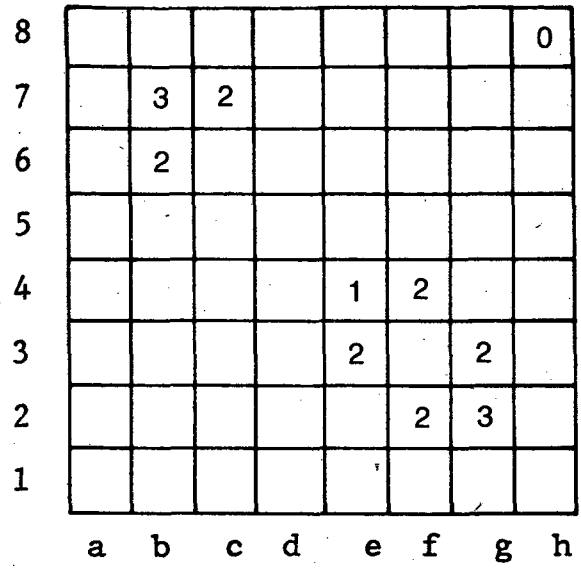
The board below shows the number of pieces attacking each of eleven cells. Where are the five pieces? The answer is on page 90.



UFOs Take Note

If green folk from Gamma Velorum
Should visit, we plan to ignore 'em:
  It's just not the year
  For saucers, we fear;
And good SF writers abhor 'em.

—**Beverly Grant**

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Wayne D. Barlowe
by Shawna McCarthy
art: Wayne D. Barlowe

At just-turned-23, Wayne Douglas Barlowe may well be the youngest professional artist working in science fiction. That by itself might be enough for some people, but it's not enough for him. Over the last four years he's done over three dozen covers for such publishing houses as Ballantine, Berkley, Dell, and Random House; in addition, he's done covers for both *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* and *Analog*. What he's best known for, however, is his popular *Barlowe's Guide to Extraterrestrials*, published in 1979 by Workman Press. Co-authored by Ian Summers, the book has had one hardcover and two soft-cover printings and at the time of this writing has approximately 92,000 copies in print. The book won the 1979 *Locus* poll for Best Art Book and was nominated for the Hugo and the American Book Award. Barlowe's work has appeared in *Tomorrow and Beyond*, a collection of SF artwork edited by Ian Summers, and has been hung in shows in New York City and Connecticut. *And* he's co-chairman (with Vincent di Fate) of the Association of Science Fiction Artists Grievance Committee. Add to that a stint at teaching science fiction art at Parsons School of Design, as well as memberships in both the Graphic Artists Guild and the Society of Illustrators, and you have a very busy 23-year-old.

Where did all the energy and talent come from? How did he have *time* to do all this stuff in only 23 years? Well, he comes from a family of artists—his parents, Sy and Dorthea Barlowe, are both very well known natural history artists, and he attributes a good deal of his drive and his love of art to them. He also attributes his insistence on anatomical correctness in his work to having worked and studied with his parents; a lifetime of exposure to the painstaking detail of natural history illustration has paid off in his art.

He started learning his craft at a very young age, beginning at the Art Students League when he was 11. He studied there with Earl Mayan and Gustav Rehberger, and it was there that he came to realize that "art is the kind of discipline for which you have no one to answer to but yourself." After high school he studied for two years at Cooper Union, a well known college for art and science in New York City. These years were not happy ones for him, and he says of them, "The 'fine art' snobbery of both students and faculty

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was appalling. I had thought that I would be accepted in art school for the work that I did, not the esoteric philosophy that I cloaked it in. There was one professor at Cooper, though, who proved to be a constant source of enlightenment. Charles Seide demonstrated the kind of broad-minded tolerance of all forms of art I felt was a prerequisite for a fine teacher. I learned a great deal about form and color from him."

An SF reader from a very early age, it was perhaps natural that his love of art and his love of SF should meet. Some four years ago, he decided that it was time for him to start looking for work. An SF paperback he'd just bought had an ad for the late *Cosmos* magazine in it; he took his portfolio in to Jack Gaughan, then art director of *Cosmos*, and Jack gave him an assignment. His first commissioned piece of SF art was a portrait of a Cygnostik, an alien from a Michael Bishop story. Of this piece Barlowe says, "Anyone with that copy of *Cosmos* can compare it with the same alien painted three years later for the *Guide*. I can only hope that not too many copies of that issue survive."

From his work at *Cosmos*, he says, "It was only a short hop to Berkley, thanks to that editor par excellence Dave Hartwell, who was then editor of the Berkley line. From that point on it became much easier to obtain commissions."

His artistic influences are varied, ranging from Howard Pyle, Ingres, and Maxfield Parrish to the Wyeths. A major influence was the work of a Czech painter named Zdenek Burian. Of Burian's work Barlowe says, "His paintings of dinosaurs, cavemen, etc., dating from the '30s through the '50s, were and are beyond compare. They've weathered the storm from my childhood to the present with virtually no complaint."

Barlowe's guidelines for evaluating art are stringent. "For a painting to be complete, to me, it must be composed of various elements all thoughtfully manipulated. The color, the form of the images, the lights and darks, the technique: all must blend in a subtle fashion to convey some emotion as well as to make a point. To me, all of the following artists qualify as favorites for varying reasons, yet they're all strong in all those areas: John Berkey, Frank Frazetta, H.R. Giger, Vincent di Fate, Paul Lehr, Ernst Fuchs, and Robert McCall. All of these artists appeal to me on different levels—some for their use of colors, others for their innovative design. All seem, however, to be wonderful draftsmen."

With the success of the *Guide*, Barlowe's become a bit typecast by art directors, who immediately think of him whenever they have

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an alien that needs drawing. Does this bother him? "Not a bit. I find that 'organic' SF subjects are easier and much more appealing to me than hardware. I think you have to have a fairly technical background to deal with hardware convincingly. By the same token, I have a fairly heavy background in natural history, so I feel I can do aliens convincingly. I think that an area of SF art that's been overlooked is the 'figure in an alien setting' school. If an alien is cantering down an alleyway on another world, the only thing scientific about it is its alienness; the science involved is implied, both in the scene itself and in the fact of viewing it. I appreciate the subtlety of this distinction; there don't have to be gadgets lying around to impress on the viewer that it's SF."

In order to do a cover, Barlowe says, "I always read a manuscript from beginning to end, taking many notes relating to imagery. Everything from clothing to shrubbery is recorded with page numbers for reference. I do about a dozen thumbnail sketches and then go on to a formal, finished sketch which I show to the art director. My sketches are fairly elaborate, because I'd rather deal with any problems at this stage, rather than while I'm painting. The sketch is usually on vellum and tinted from behind. I then trace the approved sketch down on Bainbridge 172 illustration board, and proceed to lay in the background. I use nothing but acrylics, mainly because I grew up with them. All paints have their virtues, but to me acrylics seem eminently suitable for this kind of work: they are bright, fast-drying, and very permanent."

His plans for the future are ambitious. At present, he's working with Robert Silverberg on an illustrated novel called *Thype*. "It's been rattling around in my head for over four years," he says. "It centers around a non-human and his trek over an unthinkably vast alien landscape. Throughout his odyssey he encounters many strange and wonderful beings, and there won't be a single human in the entire book." Silverberg will write the text from an outline supplied by Barlowe, and the artist plans to do over a hundred interior illustrations, many in color.

His commitment to SF and SF art runs deep, and he works constantly to improve his craft. "SF is an outlet for the imagination, and that is one of our most enduring and valuable gifts—it has no limits. SF art will be with us until mankind is incapable of dreaming. It has been with us since the first primitive scrawled a many-armed rain deity on a desert rock, and I see no reason why it should not follow us to the stars."

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BLUEWATER DREAMS

by Sydney J. Van Scyoc

art: Frank Borth

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The author reports that she has let the gophers have the garden this year, and she's transferred her office from the converted dairy shed back to the regular house.

Namir was sleeping, the breeze on her face, when Mega slipped through the window and touched her with cold fingers. Namir woke immediately, briefly confused. "Mega?" Then, by the light of the nightlamp, she saw the swelling that disfigured her friend's face, distinguished the mottled patches that underlay Mega's fine body hair, and her heart sank. She sat with an involuntary sob. "No, Mega."

"It's come to me." Mega's voice was seldom more than a whisper. That, combined with the softness of the fine dark hair that covered her and the half-hidden glint of her eyes, made her a creature of shadow and subtlety. Tonight her voice was wispy, regretful. "It's taking me, Namir."

"No." Useless word. These things happened each time new settlers came from Zabath, Shandoar, and Perdin. Diseases that scarcely touched humans savaged Mega's kind, those who insisted upon living in the human settlement. This was a new pathology, one no one had yet named. Some tiny organism from some far world had come to Zabath and silently taken up life with its new human host, causing neither discomfort nor death. But when it rode its host to Rahndarr and met the Birleles, it was a killer.

Now the killer had found Mega—Mega, who was always so insouciant, skipping up and down the redrock steps of Rahndatown after Namir even when Namir tried to send her away. Quickly Namir embraced her friend, trying to warm her slight body. She could feel the bones through the thin flesh. In the sunlight, running, leaping, Mega was swift and dauntless. In Namir's arms, cold and afflicted, she was fragile. "If you had gone back to the mountains—" Namir said hopelessly.

She herself had lured Mega down. Music was the thing that drew Birleles to Rahndatown—singing, the ring of cymbals, the call of horns. They were fascinated by the bright sounds but could not make music themselves, just as they could not duplicate the bright colors of the cloth the human settlers wore. The Birleles lived high in the greyrock mountains with only the music of the wind in the crags and the bright color of an occasional shatterflower. Namir had sat at the foot of the greyrock mountain one day, lonely, singing

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songs from Shandoar and crying, and had seen bright eyes peering at her from the rocks. Sense told her to quit singing then, to chase the Birlele back up the mountain to her own kind. But sense had not been with her that day, only loneliness, and she had tempted Mega all the way back to Rahndatown with her, just to have her company. "If you had not come with me—"

Mega quivered in Namir's arms. "I would have come to Rahndatown one day anyway. I'm one of the ones who has to come here and know the human things."

Yes, just as there were many Birleles in the mountains who would never come to Rahndatown, who resisted the call of music and color and new experience. Namir had often thought about them and wondered if they were the strong ones, or if the strong ones were the ones like Mega, who risked themselves for the new experience.

"I would have come," Mega repeated, "and one day I would have gone back to my mountain. Now I must go tonight."

Namir's arms stiffened. She released her friend, keenly aware of the chill of her room, of the weight of her blankets. "You can't—you can't go back there. You've heard—"

"Namir, I have to go to the dreaming ponds," Mega whispered with shivering intensity. "I need my dreams now. They're calling me." Through puffy lids, her eyes were earnest, pleading.

Namir shivered. The dreaming ponds lay high on the mountain where Mega's people lived. The Birleles bathed in them at important times and had dreams then to guide them. "Namir—"

Mega's eyes glinted faintly. "Namir, I've had my child-dreams, my naming-dreams, my hunting-dreams. Now it is time for my dying-dreams." One slight hand closed on Namir's arm. "You have dreams too, Namir. You know the call of them."

Yes, she dreamed often enough, but always in her bed and always of Shandoar. "Mega—you can't go. Your people—they won't let you go up the mountain with disease." At least that was what the separatists said when they went before the Council of Governors to request laws to send the Birleles who lived in Rahndatown back to the mountains. The Birleles took disease too easily, they said, and when they tried to go back to their mountains to die, their mountain kin caught them on the lower slopes and bled them, rather than letting them carry disease to the high Birlele habitats.

"They will stop me, perhaps," Mega said. "But when I tell them I go for my dying-dreams, they will let me pass."

"No, Mega. The separatists—"

"Namir, do you believe the separatists? Over me? They say they

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want to send us back for our own good, but they have other reasons—other reasons for not wanting us here."

Namir frowned. Yes, there was more than altruism behind the separatists' vehemence. There was a fear of the non-human intelligence of the Birleles, even a fear of their strange shadowed beauty. Not everyone was attracted by the alien. Many were frightened and repelled by it. "But the dead Birleles that have been found on the lower paths—" She had heard of the way they died, their blood drained from their bodies.

"Namir, you know there are predators on the mountain. Many of them."

"I—I don't know what to believe, Mega." Even if the Birleles would let Mega pass, Namir was reluctant to let her go tonight. The Birleles exhibited a wide range of body temperatures and changed in many ways with the warm and cold of day and night. By night they were slow-moving and sometimes confused. If their body temperatures fell below a certain level, compensatory mechanisms came into play and warmed them, and then their minds cleared. But by day, with sunlight warming them, they moved swiftly and their thoughts were quicksilver. "At least wait for morning, when it's warm. You'll walk faster then."

"I'll go farther if I start now, before I become weaker. Namir—"

"Mega—wait and I'll sing for you. You have to let me sing for you a last time." She said it as an inducement but immediately recognized it for a plea. She needed to sing for Mega again. They had begun their friendship with singing. If it must end, then it must end that way.

And perhaps after she had sung, Mega would realize she couldn't risk the walk to the mountain. Perhaps—

She didn't wait for consent. Holding the fragile body, she began to rock, singing a wordless melody from her creche days on Shandoar. She felt Mega first resist, then fall to the spell of the song. Her lids hooded her eyes and her breath grew deep and sighing. Once she said, querulously, "Namir—" But Namir knew Mega's weakness and she continued singing, softly, wordlessly, trying to warm Mega with her own body heat.

"Namir—please. I have to go."

Namir did not release her. She sang until her song finally lulled them both to sleep. Even then she seemed to feel the catch of her voice in her throat, until sometime much later when she woke and realized that she was sobbing rather than singing. She sat with a start. First dawn was in the sky and she was alone.

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There was unreality in her room. Surely she had imagined Mega's visit. Other Birleles fell victim to infection; never Mega. Mega had been her special friend for three years and would be until Namir took her first year-mate.

But she knew she had not dreamed the visit, the disease or the plea. Certainly she had not dreamed Mega's disappearance. Mega had gone to the dreaming ponds.

Alone, and there were predators on the mountain. Whether they were Mega's own kind or other species, there was danger and Mega would be too weak to resist it. The chill of dawn entered Namir's bones. She had brought Mega to the valley—never mind that she had tried many times to send her away—and now Mega was dying of human-borne infection.

Quickly Namir left her bed and dressed, her fingers trembling. This was the coldest time, the hour before sunrise, and Mega would travel slowly. If Namir could find her before she reached the mountain and bring her back—

She had hoped to leave the dwelling unnoticed. But her father was awake. She encountered him in the passageway, the anger of a new day already on his face. He was not happy in Rahndatown, where new settlers pressed in on all sides. His chronic dissatisfaction found ready focus in Namir's behavior. "Early today," he said, a hard undertone in his voice.

"I couldn't sleep." For once she was anxious not to rankle him.

"People seldom sleep when they are singing. And I saw your friend as she left."

"She came this way?" Usually Mega came and went through Namir's bedroom window.

"Would I have seen her otherwise? And I saw her disease." He turned, and for a moment his eyes gleamed fiercely. "She won't be back, you know. She is gone for good now."

Namir sucked a painful breath. "Father—"

"Don't dispute me. I told you never to sing to a Birlele and you did. I told you to send her back when you first brought her here and you did not. I told you to close your window and your door to her and you said you would do what you pleased. Now you have done it."

Yes, and Mega would die. Namir released her breath in an angry sob. It was useless to argue with him, to remind him that she had tried many times to send Mega back. And if she had closed her window and door to her, Mega would simply have become another wistful Rahndatown Birlele, taking food and shelter where she could

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find it. "And I'd do it again!" she said angrily, suddenly full of her own grievance. "She's the only thing I've had here! I left everything else behind on Shandoar—my school-sisters, my friends—"

She had touched a nerve. "You left them to make a new life here! And so you will! Do you expect to have everything you had on Shandoar—at once? I've waited all my life to have what you will have here in a few years more."

"The mines?" she demanded sharply, forgetting that she did not want to rankle him. "Is that what you're giving me?"

Even in the dim light of the passageway, she saw his face congest. He wrenched at her arm. "Have I ever asked you to use pick and lantern? Have I ever sent anyone but myself down those tunnels to dig?"

"No—but you'd be happier if you could!" she shot back—unfairly. Why she always deflected his own bitterness back at him twofold, why she always fought, she didn't know. "With two of us digging, we could move to the farlands that much sooner."

"We'll be there in good enough time." Namir's mother had appeared in the doorway of her bedroom, frowning, her hands clenched.

Namir's father turned, releasing Namir's arms. He seemed caught between them, a big man, angry. "No time in Rahndatown is good time."

"Yet we can't go to the farlands until we can go," Namir's mother reminded him. "And you make it worse by going to the tunnels without your mask and tank. You make yourself mindsick." Her voice was low, contained, but with a sharp edge. "You know there are gasses in the tunnels. Ask anyone who watches the miners come up at the end of the day. We can tell from the faces which ones have used their masks. Those are the ones who look tired. The others, the ones who are angry, the way you are always angry—"

"You wouldn't be angry when you came here to grow wintergrasses in the farlands and then had to mine the mountain to buy emigration permits?"

"You knew about the permits when we came. And you know about the gasses in the mine too."

It was a familiar argument, his bitter impatience pitted against her gritty persistence. It would go on until he left for the tunnels. Silently Namir slipped down the passageway and out the door. Neither of them noticed.

Rahndatown was little more than a series of cavities cut into the redrock mountainside: windows, doors, ventholes, hollowed-out rooms. Its look was bleak by dawn, as if the mountain were beset

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with parasites. And its paths and stairs were shaggy with weeds and litter. Rahndatown was no proud place, and every fresh shipload of immigrants added a new tawdriness.

Yet there was music and color too, during the bright hours of day. The settlers from Shandoar had a tradition of music and those from Perdin dyed and wove their own cloth so they could wear the brilliant colors they chose in designs that pleased them. The Zabathi cheerfully adopted both traditions and added a few of their own. As Namir slipped down the steps that led to the lower levels, she was aware of an occasional Birlele peering at her from rocky shelter, wondering if she would sing, wondering if when it grew warm and she removed her jacket, there would be colorsilks beneath.

Namir averted her eyes and hurried. Most of these Birlele had no particular friend. They lived as they could, seldom well by human standards. Yet friendship had not saved Mega.

Once beyond the burrowed settlement, she ran through the slag-piled regions at the foot of the mountain, past the timbered mouth of the mine, down streets of quikpanel warehouses that held export and import materials. There were already people and machinery at work among the warehouses and in the sorting and assembling sheds. And in the distance, the smelters offered fiery sparks to the grey morning sky.

Once or twice she recognized a face among the workers and wanted to stop and ask if Mega had come this way. But what other way was there through the valley toward the greyrock mountains?

None. Namir ran.

Soon she left Rahndatown behind. And soon the morning sun climbed over the crags of the distant mountains and banished grey from the sky. Namir turned once and peered back toward Rahndatown, trying to find something there to warm her. But she could see nothing there to stand comparison with her memory of Shandoar's muraled buildings and green parks.

Her eyes stung. *I never minded that people pressed us on all sides. I never minded that everything on Shandoar had already been built and there was nothing more to build. I never minded any of that.*

But I do mind the roughness and emptiness here. We have to lock the flute and horn in cases to keep grit from scarring them. We hardly take them out anymore. And my voice—how long will my voice be sweet here?

The morning began to warm and she sang; testing her voice against the air. If Mega had not run too far ahead, if she heard Namir singing—

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But there was no sign that Mega heard. Namir watched the brush that choked the valley for sign of her friend, or for fresh footprints. Several times she saw crushed vegetation and once she found a place where someone had uprooted sweetroot and chewed the starchy tuber. That could have been anyone, Birlele or human.

Pausing, discouraged, she pulled sweetroot and chewed it herself. Then she continued to the lowermost slopes of the mountain where she had first met Mega.

She found her there on the path, her slight body sprawled gracelessly, her breath harsh. For a moment, Namir only wanted to turn back and forget seeing her like this. If she could remember her running in the sun instead, limbs flashing, dark hair gleaming—

Mega stirred and pulled herself to a sitting position. Her swollen face was grotesque and mottled patches glared angrily through her dark hair. " 'Mir—you've come to carry me."

Namir forced herself forward. "I—I've come to take you back. Yes."

Mega struggled to her feet, her limbs thrashing almost angrily. "No—no. You've come to carry me to the ponds. You have to carry me, 'Mir. I thought I could walk, but I can't. It's taking me—this disease."

Namir felt a quick twist of fear. "Mega—no. I can't take you there."

Despite her infirmity, Mega's eyes glinted. "You believe them then—the people who want to keep us in the mountains. You believe that my own people will catch us on the paths and kill us. You're afraid of them."

Was she? Afraid of Mega's kind? Namir could not deny it. The Birleles who lived in Rahndatown were eager and whispering, caught up in the excitement of human activity and color. That made them somehow childish. Those who lived in the seclusion of the mountains were surely different. They were not susceptible to human ways. They were an intelligent species with rituals and traditions and—Mega said—legends. Intelligent enough, certainly, to know that if they permitted humans to penetrate the upper reaches of the mountains where they lived, they would take disease and die. Namir wet her lips with her tongue. "Mega, maybe there is something the doctors can give you. If you let me take you back—"

Mega peered up at her unwinkingly. "You know there is nothing, 'Mir. What I need are my dreams. The dreamwaters call me."

Namir hesitated, torn. If the separatists were right, if it was the mountain Birleles who had killed those returning Birleles found

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dead on the lower slopes— She peered up the mountainside. The greyrock was stark and harsh-shadowed, a stern environment. But somewhere were the dreams Mega remembered—dreams much like Namir's memories of Shandoar, precious, tantalizing, evanescent.

Certainly she had never heard of any Birlele harming any human. Perhaps that was simply because no human had climbed the greyrock mountains.

Perhaps not. Deciding, she took her friend in her arms. "I'll take you to the ponds." To the dreams. Perhaps someone would take her back to Shandoar one day, to the silken park grasses and muraled walls she remembered. She could hope.

Although Mega stood half as tall as Namir, carrying her up the mountain path was like carrying nothing. According to Birlele legend, the Birlele were descended from avians. The webbed membrane that connected Mega's upper arms to her slight torso seemed testimony to the authenticity of the legend. And she was light, her bones insubstantial. Occasionally, imagining watchful Birlele soaring on mountain air currents, Namir glanced up the mountain apprehensively.

But the Birleles had not flown for hundreds of centuries, and they did not fly today. Instead, at midafternoon, they suddenly perched in numbers upon the rocks that overlooked the path, their breath a menacing hiss. Namir halted, peering up at them, her nerves frozen. They had appeared silently, without warning. Mega sighed and opened her eyes.

Namir fought a suddenly-thick tongue. "Mega—will they understand me? If I talk to them?" The hissing grew louder. The Birlele were two dozen, and they hunched as if ready to spring. Their body hair was denser than Mega's, darker, glossier. Their bodies were more muscular. And their faces were twisted in warning.

Mega summoned a weak whisper. "They will understand if you sing."

Namir shivered. Sing to two dozen hostile Birlele? On a steep mountain trail with her friend dying in her arms? "If *you* talk to them, Mega—"

"I don't have to talk to them. They know I'm going to the dreamwaters. Every Birlele goes there to die, and I am dying."

Namir caught her breath involuntarily. "Mega—you told me you wanted to dream in the ponds."

"I do. But that's where we die too, Namir—in the warm water." She looked up into Namir's face. "Don't be afraid—I will talk to them." Summoning strength, she spoke a few sibilant words to the

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Birlele at the side of the path.

The exchange was brief, hissing. Three of the Birlele spoke with Mega in turn and then drew back, folding their arms over their chests.

"They are glad I've come," Mega told Namir. "Only a few others have come this far who were sick. But they ask that you not let me touch ground. That way I will not soil the paths. And—they ask that you sing. They won't come to the valley for songs, but they would like them here, to know what they are like."

Namir's mouth was suddenly dry. The Birleles at the side of the path regarded her stonily. She could not believe they wanted to hear her. She could only believe they wanted to savage her. "We won't soil the paths," she said, and hoped the hissing Birleles understood.

Certainly they seemed to understand her songs. As she continued up the trail, holding Mega's chill body close, stroking her dark hair, she sang every song she knew of Shandoar. She sang its clipped grasses and its white buildings, its black beaches and the foamed water that washed them. She sang the bright clothes the people wore, and the happy voices of schools of children running to recitation. She sang all her memories of there and then she sang the memories she wished she might have had, of growing to adulthood there, of walking the parks and city-trails as a woman, of laughing under trimmed trees with her own children and the children of her school-sisters.

At first the Birleles followed warily, shoulders hunched, faintly hissing. But when Namir paused and carefully removed her jacket, never letting Mega touch ground, when she pulled her brightly patterned blouse free from its confining sash and let the colors ripple in sunlight, the Birleles quieted.

Finally they were silent, and only Namir's voice rang in the grey-rock mountains.

Despite Mega's assurances, she dared not sit to rest. She dared not let her song trail away. On their mountain, the Birleles were more alien than she had ever imagined and her voice was the only thing she had familiar. It reassured her, quenching the worst of her fear. When dark came, she pulled her jacket back over her blouse and continued up the trail, Mega directing her.

Did she only imagine during the final hour of their climb that she tasted something in the air she had never tasted before on Rahndarr? And that something— Welcome? Joy?

Then the scent in the air changed and became heavy. They reached the dreaming ponds soon after the moon rose and Namir paused,

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sampling the sulphur taint in the air. The ponds, three of them, were yellow-crusted yet vividly blue. The moon floated upon each smooth-glass surface, three times sister to itself. Namir paused and thought she had never seen it so full, so silver. Nor had she ever seen the stars of Rahndarr so vivid in the black sky.

There are many things I haven't seen here. Things I haven't wanted to see, she realized, *because I've only wanted to see Shandoar.*

Certainly she had never seen the geyser that plumed from the rocks and rose moon-silver against the night while she stood at the edge of the nearest pond. She watched its magical play with drawn breath until it sank back into the rocks. Then her breath sighed away.

I could sing about that.

. . . if Mega were not dying. Mega seemed to have shrunk in her arms. Her skin was chill, her eyes vacant. "You will have to carry me into the pond," she whispered. "Don't put me down until you can put me into the water."

"I could put you into the water now," Namir said. She stepped forward, breaking the yellow crust that ringed the pond. Warm water seeped into her boots.

"No, take me to the center of the pond. And don't be afraid of the stings, Namir."

"Stings?" Involuntarily Namir stiffened, peering down into the moonlit depths of the pool.

"Yes, they make the dreams. Sometimes I wonder about that, you know—I wonder if the stings would make you dream too. I dream like a human sometimes, at night when I sleep."

Namir hesitated at the edge of the pond. She could see nothing in the pond that might sting her. There were no insects and the bottom of the pond was of greyrock pebbles. She stroked Mega's hair. The night was cold and Mega was confused.

The Birleles who crouched behind them were not confused. They peered at Namir silently, their eyes bright and unreadable. There were several dozen of them now, some of them very old, others very young. As she hesitated, they edged forward and those nearer her raised their arms, fanning out their vestigial flight-membranes. Their shadows became grotesque on the pebbled ground.

Were they threatening her? Were they observing some ritual? Or were they simply urging her forward?

How could she know? Namir stepped forward quickly, pond water lapping up her pants legs to her thighs, her hips, her waist. It was hotter than she had guessed, almost scalding. Gasping, she stumbled

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toward the center of the pond.

And then she felt the stings. Something rippled up from the bottom of the pond, something irregular and grey—it might have been a pebble—and brushed against her leg. And stung, sharply. She jerked in surprise. "Mega—" A second object broke from the pond bottom and struck at her. This time there was numbness. It spread quickly up and down her leg. She attempted to step back, to escape the pond. Her leg buckled and instead she fell forward into the water.

Mega seemed not to notice her distress. She squirmed free of Namir's grasp and arched fluidly into the depths of the pond. As she swept underwater to the bottom of the pond, Namir saw a look of ecstatic anticipation on her swollen face. Then pebble-like objects bobbed from the bottom of the pond and swirled around her, striking at her in a quick frenzy.

Namir struggled to her feet. "No!" Without thinking, she flung herself into the water after Mega, grappling for her. Sulphur water stung her eyes and was sucked into her half-open mouth. "*Mega!*"

Mega did not reach for rescue. Instead she swam swiftly away across the pond, her dark hair washing in the water, the expression on her face intent now, expectant.

As Namir slipped and stumbled after her, she was stung again and again. With an anguished cry, she fell forward into the water, suddenly too weak to swim. Still the pebble-like objects darted at her and stung her and Mega swam just beyond reach.

Namir was aware of overwhelming weakness and terrible dizziness. Gasping, coughing, she fought to mobilize her lifeless legs, her numbing arms. She had lost voluntary control of both. Finally she sank into the pond, hot mineral water burning in her respiratory passages.

At some point consciousness faded.

At some other point it returned, in fragments. Namir gathered the fragments and realized that she lay on the verge of the pond, that it was daylight, and that she was alone. Whatever Birlele had pulled her from the water had gone with all the others. She stared up into the noonday sun. Her throat burned and her head ached. And she had the strange sense that she had dreamed.

She lay for a moment, trying to capture the substance of her dreams. The images were alien and came in incomprehensible juxtapositions—as if the dreams had not been her own but someone else's, created not from her reality of Shandoar-lost but from some other reality of Rahndarr-gained. The welcome, the joy she had felt

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the night before—somehow they had become part of her dreams.

"The meadows—" she said, hardly aware that she spoke. She had always thought shatterflowers coarse, those that grew in Rahndatown. Now she knew that in the meadows that lay far beyond the town, their gaudy colors would be vibrant. "The fields—" Her father had described them to her often enough, the fields of wintergrass they would grow in the farlands: lush, green, sweeping in the sun. She had imagined them as a terrible emptiness. Now she saw them as he must see them: vividly, hungrily. She wanted them as badly as he did.

But there was something else she wanted and that she could not have. "Mega," she said with a sob, and sat.

Mega hung in the blue water of the dreaming pond, her limbs lax, only her face breaking the water's surface. Her arms were spread, and her flight-membranes seemed to flutter despite the stillness of the pond.

Had the Birleles simply left her here like this? Left her to bloat in the water? Almost angrily Namir took her feet. If she could reach Mega's body before she was stung to unconsciousness again, pull it back to the pond's edge—

Before she could enter the water, Mega rolled to her stomach in the water and kicked herself across the pond to Namir.

Namir found herself holding her friend, holding the body that should have been stiff and cold—the body that was water-hot and living. "Mega—your face—" she stammered. The swelling was gone. So were the vivid discolorations that marked the course of the disease.

"Did you dream?" Mega demanded, her eyes lively. "Did the stings make you dream?"

"I—I think I did dream. A little. But—"

Mega nodded eagerly, shaking herself, making water fly. "I dreamed everything I wanted to dream. I spoke with the wind, I tumbled with the rocks, I rode the clouds over the mountains. Do you see them, Namir? I rode those clouds." She pointed, radiant. "We are that much alike at least. The stings made you dream too. A little."

"Yes." Perhaps. And perhaps she had dreamed simply because she often did, dreamed strangely because the last day had changed her in some way. "But Mega—" Namir peered down into the clear pond. Why was Mega alive? Why was she well? None of the Birleles in Rahndatown had recovered from this disease.

None of the Birleles in Rahndatown had come to the dreaming

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ponds. They had been too weak to come so far alone, and few of them had special friends to help them. None had special friends foolish enough to climb to the Birlele habitat. Namir stroked Mega's shoulder. It was fever hot, as if—

As if— "Mega," she realized, "you needed fever."

Mega was preening herself, deftly grooming her wet hair, sweeping it into dark whorls. "Fever?"

"You needed fever to kill the disease. And your body—your body doesn't make fever. When you got sick, you became cold instead. You had to come here to make yourself warm enough to kill the infection." Could it be that simple? Could the Birleles who lived among the humans survive human diseases simply by submersion?

"I had to come here to die," Mega corrected her. "But I had healing dreams instead of dying dreams. It happens sometimes. We dream of being well and live again."

Namir nodded. Perhaps the solution was not so simple. Perhaps there had been some subtle interaction between the heat of the dreaming pond and the venom of whatever it was that stung. Perhaps even that interaction would not suffice against all human-borne infections. Perhaps only this one.

Still Namir did not feel any sinking discouragement. Mega had stepped from the pond well. Namir had had her dreams of Rahndarr, whatever their origin. And she would tell the Council of Governors what had happened. The Council had declared for the right of the Birleles to live where they pleased on their native world, whatever the dangers. Perhaps they could do something now to alleviate the worst of those dangers. She brushed at her clothes. They were stiff in places, damp in others. "Mega, will you come back to Rahndatown with me?" Did she hope for a yes or a no?

Mega had completed her grooming and she peered up at Namir with momentary sadness. "No, Namir, I have been in Rahndatown three years and I have seen and heard what I wanted. Now there are places I dreamed and I want to visit them. The caves where my sisters live, the crags dark at night, the deep crevices where we hunt shadowleaf—"

Namir nodded, understanding. There were meadows and grasslands she wanted to see, urgently. "The others—you're sure they won't hurt you?"

Mega's eyes glinted. "Namir, they came into the pond and dreamed with me while I was healing. They were glad I returned, and they asked why others have not."

The separatists were wrong then. The Birleles had let her walk

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up their mountain paths; they had saved her from drowning in the dreampond; and they had welcomed Mega back, even sick.

They gazed at each other. It was awkward parting. There were things Namir wanted to say. Yet all she could think was, "Mega, when I dreamed, you were there." Was it a lie? Hadn't there been a quick shape moving through her half-recalled dreams? Hadn't she glimpsed it in the meadows and in the farlands?

"Then I will see you again." Noon restlessness was on Mega and her limbs moved eagerly. But before she darted away, she touched the bright sash that held Namir's blouse. "Will you leave me this?"

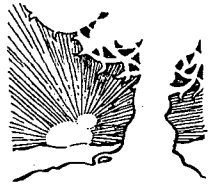
"Of course." Namir stripped it off, eager to prolong their parting. "And I'll sing for you."

At that Mega laughed, hoarsely, coughing, as Birleles laughed. "No, Namir. Don't sing until you get back to the valley. Then if there is someone there sick, sing when you carry her up the trail and we will all dream with her. Will you?"

Come up the mountain again past hissing Birleles? For a moment fear returned, unreasoning. Namir dismissed it. "Of course." She would make herself friend of those Birleles in Rahndatown who had no special friend. If they needed her, she would be there, either to speak to the Council of Governors for them or to carry them to the dreaming ponds when they were stricken.

"Then that is when I will see you," Mega said, and she leapt away as swift and dauntless as Namir remembered.

When she was gone, Namir started down the trail. Occasionally she saw Birleles watching her from the rocks. When she paused, they hissed. She longed for something familiar to reassure herself by—some song to guard against strangeness. But she looked closely and found a little bit of Mega in each watching Birlele, and she did not sing again until she reached the valley.



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SAND
by Sharon Webb
art: Tim Kirk

To put you in the mood for this piece, Mrs. Webb offers the following thought:

"But look, the morn,
in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew
of yon high eastern hill.
Break we our watch up . . ."

And let's smash the alarm clock, too.

Melancholy, Dane sat hunched at the only bar in a tiny hamlet on the planet Avon and sipped the native brew of red solution.

The light-green humanoid female next to him murmured in sympathy. "And what happened then to your friend—how you call him—Rick?"

Dane shuddered at the memory. They had been prospecting for polonium. They had descended from their skimmer and were walking the dry land when the treacherous sapient sands of Avon shifted, exposing the opening to a Rhat hole. In an instant, Rick was swept into the labyrinthine tube and buried by the pounding sand.

The humanoid female shivered empathically, "Alas! Your poor Rick."

Dane stared at her. He was bored of Avon and its natives. "You speak like a green girl," he snapped and then instantly regretted his rudeness. She wanted only to help.

The need for revenge burned in him—revenge for the death of his friend. By God, he would wrest the polonium from the sapient sands or die trying.

The green girl touched his arm. Her luminous eyes were wide with shock.

Empath, he thought. She could read his emotions as easily as his words.

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"If this is what you wish," she said, "I will accompany you. But know that it is not, nor can it come to, good."

They departed that evening via skimmer to the site of the polonium deposits beyond hills that glowed red against the sinking suns. Hovering just above the land, Dane watched in awe as the sapient sand shifted and the Rhat hole again appeared. As if mocking him, the sands moved again and the hole vanished.

Maddened, Dane flung a leg over the side of the skimmer and dropped to the surface two meters below.

The green girl cried out. "No! It is not safe to walk on this land. The sands grow angry."

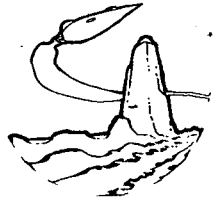
Bereft of his wits, Dane scrabbled at the ground. He clawed through the sand, burrowing onward toward his goal.

Suddenly, the sands parted again and Dane, lured to the edge of the Rhat hole watched in horror as sand came pouring out of the hole in a great eruption. He spread his hands helplessly over the spouting sand and felt his gorge rise. Then, instantly the process reversed. Dane, caught in a mighty vortex, was sucked into the pit and gone.

Only his footprints remained.

Shivering with fright, the green girl looked down from the skimmer and said, "Goodnight, sweet prints." As she watched, the remaining sand followed him down the Rhat hole, sifting as through an hour-glass, until only the underlying bare rocks were left.

Shaking her head sadly, the green girl said, "Neither a burrower nor a lander be. For loam oft loses both itself and friend."



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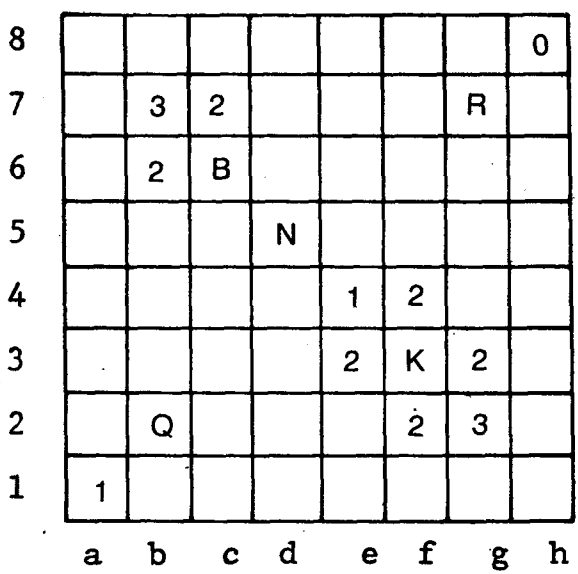
SECOND SOLUTION TO CHESS BY RAY AND SMULL
(from page 67)

Below is the only pattern I can find for the pieces. If you can "cook" the problem by finding a different solution, please let me know.

Both versions of the game can be played without a computer. Two players sit back to back, each with a board and five pieces. One places the pieces, the other asks questions, and a record is kept of the number of questions needed to know where all five pieces are. Players then trade places for the next game, and the person with the lowest number of guesses wins.

I am indebted to Jaime Poniachik of Buenos Aires (he edits a new Argentine magazine called *Humor & Juegos*, Spanish for *Humor and Games*), for suggesting this game and providing the first problem.



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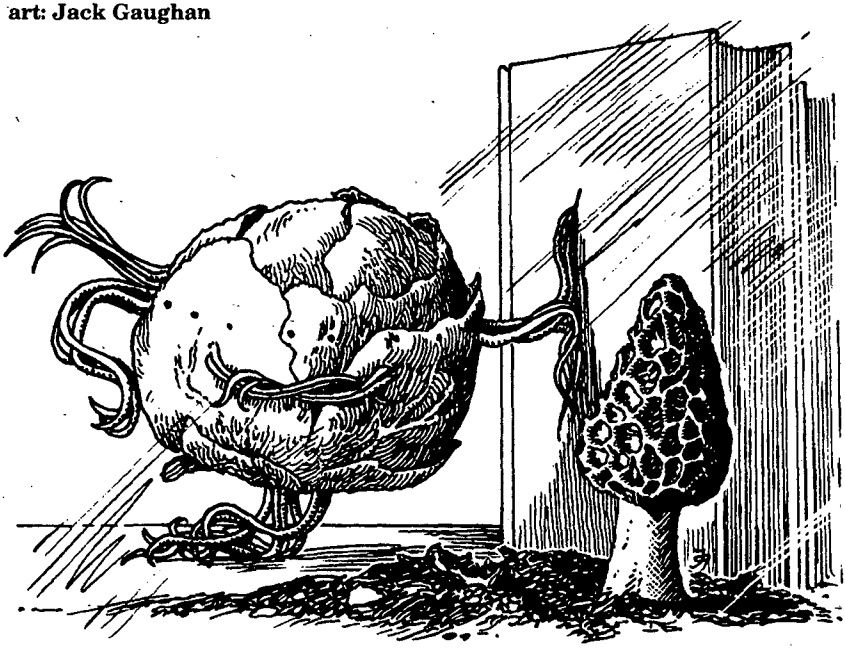
THE WIND FROM THE SEVEN SUNS

by Jack Gaughan

art: Jack Gaughan



This odd little story is Mr. Gaughan's second fiction sale.

The thing that looked like a head of lettuce leaned against a tree root and watched Ro Quick pick his way through the tall grass carpeting the clearing in the woods behind Old Man Eshenpepper's place.

The woods bordered a two-lane state highway but were so thick that traffic sounds were soon lost in lush summer growth.

As Ro approached the tree concealing the lettuce-like thing, it scuttled on little root feet to hide under a nearby lilac bush.

Ro walked around the tree inspecting it and thinking how much those bearded young college jaspers over at the Conservation Department would give to know why this particular American Chestnut tree survived and bore fruit while the blight killed all the rest. He surveyed the tree proudly as though it was his own and thought,

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"We'll just leave you be, tree. You can grow and put out more of your kind without all them scientific fellers gnawin' and sawin' and pokin' at you to see what keeps you goin'. You're lookin' pretty good. Old, tall, and sturdy. Keep up the good work."

Ro studied the ground at the base of the tree and glanced at the lilac bush knowing it marked the site of some long-gone house and human. Lilacs, he knew, were planted by people to testify to their domesticity; and they didn't grow wild. He'd have to dig here sometime . . . might find a bottle dump which was a sure sign of some forgotten homestead. He shoved his other thoughts to the back of his mind as he thrust his hands into his pockets and turned towards his home, situated just beyond the stand of shag-bark hickory on the rise between him and the setting sun.

The lettuce-like thing, walking gingerly and stealthily on its green tendril feet, followed and watched as Ro poked with a stick in the loose earth at the base of a certain tree, checking on the welfare of a rare but tasteless New York truffle discovered during a previous ramble.

As Ro let himself into his house by the kitchen door the lettuce-thing paused at the base of the certain tree, sent a tendril down to feel the spongy truffle and made what, for a head of lettuce, was a very rude sound.

Ro went to the kitchen sink to wash his hands with brown soap. You can't be too cautious about the chance of having encountered poison ivy. The spring on the kitchen door sang ever so slightly when the head of lettuce pulled it open and said, "The chestnut tree will survive. It has developed an immunity to the blight which it will pass on to its . . ."

"I seen you up there in the woods." Ro glanced at the leafy thing standing in his doorway while he dried his hands.

"You don't miss a trick do you?" The head of lettuce let the door swing shut and came to the edge of the kitchen linoleum.

"I don't miss much. I was figuring to come back up that way tomorrow to see what you was. Them little roots or feet or whatever of yours left tracks all over the place the like I never saw. You want up on the table where we can talk better? You want some potting soil? I got an old flower pot around here somewheres."

"Yes, thanks," said the plant, "though I could make it by myself. I'll forego the potting soil right now. Maybe later."

The old man placed the leafy green ball on a doily in the center of the kitchen table and drew up a chair for himself. He felt around in his shirt pocket for his eyeglasses. "The old peepers ain't what

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they used to be," he said.

"You surprise me," said the plant. "I've seen enough creatures, all calling themselves men, on this and other planets to know that none of them would react so calmly to conversing with what they might take to be a talking salad."

"I never been much good at bein' other men, and I done enough kicking around not to be surprised at hardly anything. I got eyes in my head, and when I seen you up there this afternoon I knew you was a stranger to these parts. I seen you could move from place to place; that's pretty odd in a plant; but I never expected to strike up no conversation. From what you say I gather you ain't from Earth?"

"A nice observation. No, I'm not even from this solar system or galaxy." Little tendrils appeared from the plant's leafy folds and gestured skyward.

"Look . . . can I get you something to eat or drink or . . . ?" Ro tilted his head back to peer through the bottom lenses of his bifocals.

"No, that won't be necessary. Your soil is rich and moist."

"Yeah. Well, we had plenty rain lately. You got a rocket-ship up to the woods somewhere?"

"No space ship, rocket or otherwise. In truth I have no mechanical implements of any kind. I know that sounds odd to you who are certain that civilization and intelligence must go hand in hand with technological development, but I never even needed the *wheel*." The plant drew up its roots and rested its round body on the doily in the center of the table.

"How'd you get here then? Seeds on the wind?"

"Something like that. Spores borne along by the pressure of light carry me where I will."

"Arrhenius."

"What's that?" asked the plant.

"Swedish fellah. Had an idea about life spores scattering all over the universe. I read about it but never held with it much. Till now." Ro pushed back from the table, went to the refrigerator, and returned with two bottles of beer.

"It goes against my grain not to offer a guest a little something. Would you care to join me?" He twisted off the bottle caps and reached for a saucer to pour some beer for the plant.

"No thank you. I am neither parasitic nor cannibalistic. Your beer, I can sense, is made from plant material and I . . ."

"Take me for a damfool! Of course alcohol wouldn't do a plant no good. What could I have been thinkin' of? Hold on, I'll be right back."

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He went into a closet just off the porch and returned with a plastic bottle three-quarters full of a murky green sludge. "This oughta fill the bill. It made the spider plant in the hall go wild. It's my own recipe of fertilizer. Hope you ain't bothered by the fishy smell."

The plant quivered a little and said, "It reminds me of a planet where I . . . Well, let's try it."

Ro poured the beer from the saucer down the drain, rinsed it, splashed some of the sludge into it, and then put it near the plant. The thing's roots crept out from under the folds of leaf and slithered into the green sludge.

"That's quite . . . er . . . refreshing."

Ro rubbed his chin, feeling the stubble he'd have to scrape off in the morning. "That's some circulatory system you got there. Swift!"

"Oh yes! Not quite like your heart. I don't have your expand-and-contract muscular system. I function by manipulating the size of my cellular structure. I extend and shrink various cells by shunting moisture from one set to another. It's really no more complicated than your own system." The level of green goo was visibly falling.

"That's pretty complicated. You ain't really talkin' are you?"

Little tendrils crept out from the plant's leaves and intertwined over its roundness like interlocked fingers over a full stomach after a large meal. "You'd call it telepathy, but we'll let it go at that. I've only been around for a few millenia and don't know the full extent of my powers yet." A richer, greener color was suffusing the thing's leaves.

Ro finished off the first bottle of beer, leaned back, scratched his stomach, and belched. "Well now, I guess I seen just about everything," he said reaching for the second bottle.

The plant tilted a bit to one side. "You've seen this valley on this little, remote planet; but you haven't seen everything. I remember my second seeding. It was on a planet under seven suns whose moisture was locked into the chemical structure of its soil. The soil was made up of extremely small, perfectly spherical diamonds. That was really a problem. On my first big trip out it was necessary for me to devise an entirely new discipline of chemistry to get at the water I needed in those diamonds. Fortunately my native ingenuity and intellect was equal to the task. I solved the problem just as my leaves had all but turned black. I removed all the moisture and nutritive compounds from about thirty acres of diamonds and grew a root structure so vast that eventually it became too large to support, so I disengaged myself from the system—stepped out of myself you might say—and proceeded to go to seed—as it were. I built up

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sufficient pressure within my body to expel spores, which now contained the essential me, beyond the pull of the diamond planet's gravity, and once beyond its pull caught the solar wind from the seven suns."

Ro scratched his nose. "We got witch hazel trees that do somethin' like that . . ."

The plant continued, "Sailing along on whatever light I could grab, I came across—in the supposed emptiness of space—some widely scattered but related particles which displayed a kind of dim intelligence. When I had contacted enough of them I discovered they were the scattered atoms of an exploded planet, which had been a living entity before catastrophe struck." The plant began to wave its tendrils erratically. "The planet had been a beautiful and pleasant one and had nursed its happy inhabitants into a highly evolved state just short of knowing the whys and wherefores of everything." A tendril wiped away a drop of moisture crawling down one of the thing's leaves. "Now it floats between the stars through infinity, carrying only a vague and pitifully sad memory of what it had been. That memory grows dimmer with each passing millennium.

"Then there was the time I was wafted onto this great hothouse of a planet, whose thick layers of murky clouds and greenhouse atmosphere nurtured a race of tall, orange, vegetable creatures. They were very primitive with, however, a modicum of intelligence and promising powers of discrimination. They were rather like your carrots, but with more taste. They worshipped me as a god until I tired of their simple adoration. Mine is essentially a restless nature with a hungry intellect and . . ."

"Yeah . . . well . . . look, you got a name?" Ro glanced at the old railroad clock on the wall.

"You can call me anything just don't call me late for . . ."

"It's gettin' late, and I have my early chores to do, so what say we call it a day?" Ro believed in sleeping when it was time to sleep and waking when it was time to wake.

"Surely! But first let me tell you of a world where I grew so large from its incredible nutrients that I dwarfed the tallest mountain and cast a shadow over one entire continent twish the size of . . ." The nameless plant went on and on, its words diminishing into a kind of muted hum. The green goo was all gone from the saucer.

Sleepily Ro went into his bedroom saying, "I hope he don't snore."

"Reckon I'll call you Windy."

"Ah, I see: A polite reference to that nicely turned poetical phrase

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of mine from last night, 'the wind from the seven suns'." The plant, now a pale yellow hue, sat in the kitchen window above the sink basking in the light from the mid-morning sun.

"It suits you." Ro had just returned from the general store at the intersection of the only two cross-roads in town and was removing articles from a paper bag and placing some of them in a knotty-pine cupboard.

"What was in that concoction you gave me last night?" Tendrils from the plant draped down from its perch on the window-sill and wound around the chrome-plated kitchen faucet thrusting into its nozzle. Its color was changing from a sickly yellow to a pale leaf-green.

"Oh, I dunno. There was some fish in it that had gone a little ripe and some mighty rich stuff I found inside an old, dead Dutch elm tree . . . things like that. And, oh yeah, there was some of this peculiar pink stuff I found growin' along about Springtime on a rotten log out back of the house. It was all pink and mushy and kinda shiny-like, only it turned black instantly I poked it with my walkin' stick. Never saw the like before; but it was an unusual, damp spring; and all kinds of mushrooms and fungus and shingles popped up which nobody'd ever seen before. Anyway I figured it might be useful and scraped it off and brought it home. I don't like to throw nothin' out." Ro placed a six-pack of bottled beer in the refrigerator, folded the empty bag neatly, and slipped it into a drawer under the sink.

"Pink? Did this substance have little red flecks in it?"

"Why, I believe it did, Windy. And the flecks was ringed by little red circles. You know what it was?"

The plant withdrew its tendrils from the faucet and began to groom its leaves. "Yes, I think I do. I've come across it before."

Ro glanced heavenward. "From out there?"

"Yes, I ran across huge colonies of the things living in the atmosphere of the planet Jupiter. They had a certain amount of organization, but were of a very low level of intelligence with little promise of improvement. I hung about a while to observe them and shortly knew all I wanted to know about them. Eruptions of tremendous force from the planet's interior would toss the stuff out into space. Most of it fell back into the atmosphere or remained in orbit about the planet; but some of it was flung all the way to Mars and, evidently, even here. Very crude creatures, really, but their substance contained an extremely complex protein which can have quite unusual effects on vegetable matter." The plant stood up on its roots and stretched its tendrils like a cat stretching after a nap.

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"I'm tolerable relieved I didn't go pokin' my stick at no intelligent critters." Ro opened the face of the railroad clock and, with a key, began to wind it methodically.

"They were quite stupid. I'd not be concerned if I were you."

"I'll take your word for it. But by golly! That might explain somethin'." Ro carried the plant with him into the living room. "Look here. I haven't been able to figure this out. Thought maybe it was my first million." He placed the plant on a small table between an aquarium and a second fish tank serving as a terrarium.

"What's that?" asked the plant, gesturing.

"What you're pointin' at is a fresh-water clam but what I wanted you to see is this here mushroom in the other tank. Big and pretty, ain't it?"

"And what's so special about a dumb mushroom?" Windy shrugged disdainfully.

"That growin' right there in my house ever since when the Mayapples come out is a morel mushroom. Them is the most *dee*licious mushrooms ever. The absolute best. Only can't nobody grow 'em commercial. I put some of what was left of that pink critter into the soil around this here beauty and brung the whole shootin' match in the house. And she's growin'! Any man that can figure how to grow these commercial has got his hands on a million bucks because ain't nobody been able to do it yet. Only this one just grows. Ain't had any little ones yet." Ro peered with pride down at the spongy spire in the terrarium.

"I suppose time will tell. It's just a stupid mushroom nourished by some equally unintelligent muck from Jupiter."

"From what you say, there must be all kinds of strange things scattered hither and yon that just drop in on us from outer space." Ro put on his bifocals and peered closely at the plant. "Say! You got little eyes like my clam there."

"Did you think that only meteorites fell from the skies? There are all sorts of things out there; some just molecules drifting between galaxies and others of quite diverse natures posessing social structure and varying degrees of intelligence. I didn't know a clam had eyes."

Ro looked again through the lower portion of his lenses and said, "Yep! Just like yours. Little tiny ones. Only yours go all the way around."

"I am capable of 'seeing' in virtually all ranges of the spectrum. I can see sound, radio waves, light. And there is a faint universal glow I've found everywhere I've been. It's way up in the extreme

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high range, but even I don't know what it is or where it comes from. It pervades everything, however; and that's why I travel as I do from planet to planet and galaxy to galaxy: to discover its origin. And I am certainly not to be placed on a level with a clam." The plant hopped down from the table and scuttled into a patch of sunlight on the kitchen floor.

"I think I've just about exhausted the possibilities of this place. The universal vibration doesn't originate here, and I'm getting bored and restless. I do appreciate your feelings towards plants like the chestnut tree. I wanted to tell you to keep up the good thoughts before I left. And it's about time I left." The plant seemed to be staring out the window towards the sky.

"It's been nice meetin' you, Windy. Have a little somethin' before you go? One for the road?" Ro reached for a bottle of beer and the container of green goo.

"Thanks. I think I can handle a short one. A hair of the dog, I believe you call it." The plant hopped from the floor to a chair then to the table.

"Lotsa folks don't hold with a nip so early in the day; but there ain't no yardarm here, so *bon voyage*, Windy. Here's mud in your eye. Eyes." Ro poured a generous dollop of the sludge into a soup bowl. The plant perched on top of the bowl and dropped its roots.

"Once on a planet called Kalallii, the god-like inhabitants—you'd compare them to rather large sea-slugs—became so enamoured of me and fascinated by my wit and talents that they conspired to prevent my leaving. When I felt it was time to go they summoned up planet-wide storms of such force and ferocity that their seas blew away and great bolts of lightning blasted their mountains to piles of rubble. In the process they rendered themselves extinct. Poor creatures. Needless to say I escaped their puny manifestations and sailed out into the swirling gulf of infinity, as ever seeking the source of that universal glow. When the next planet came along—this might amuse you—I fell gracefully into a vast garden half the size of your Africa, which was tended by an intelligent and beautiful race resembling large, golden squirrels. They were so spineless, however, that they allowed themselves to be enslaved by a cruel and haughty bunch of conceited beings rather like your earthworms. The worms thought themselves the end result of the handiwork of the universe. Snotty bunch, they were. But I put them in their place. Using my vast experience and quite respectable—not to say incredible—powers of persuasion, I infused into the timid and retiring squirrel-like creatures a fiery self-esteem and at the end quite re-

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versed their situation by teaching them the simple art of fishing. Well, I must be off." With that the plant rose from the empty bowl and, waving its tendrils, hopped out the back door, slamming the screen door behind it. In a few minutes a sound like the distant firing of a shotgun came from the woods.

Ro strolled back into the living room where he dropped a powdery substance into the aquarium and doled out some green goo to the mushroom. "Windy was a good name for him. Boastful little bugger. Never seen such a one for talkin'."

"You can say that again," said the clam.

The mushroom shrugged.

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THE SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR
by Erwin S. Strauss

An old con(vention) is being revived, and the first con ever is set for Nebraska. Now is the Golden Age of social weekends with your favorite authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. The hotline is (703) 273-6111. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number and I'll call back at my expense. When writing cons, enclose an SASE. When calling, be polite. Look for me at cons as Filthy Pierre.

CapriCon. For info, write: **Box 416, Zion IL 60099.** Or phone: **(312) 764-8137** (10 am to 10 pm, not collect). Con will be held in: Evanston, IL (if location omitted, same as in address) on: 20-22 Feb., 1981. Guests will incude: Terry (Universe) Carr, J. & M. Holmes.

StellarCon, c/o Allen, Box 4-EUC, UNC-G, Greensboro NC 27412. 27 Feb.-1 Mar. Masquerade. Participation by the S. C. A., who live medievally (e.g., leaders chosen by combat).

Open ESFA, (201) 753-4055. Wayne NJ, 1 Mar. The annual open meeting of the Eastern SF Association, a tradition for 30 years, resumes after a 5-year lapse. On film: Asimov.

WisCon, (608) 233-0326 (eves), (608) 231-2916 (days). Madison WI, 6-8 Mar. Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, R. & J. Coulson, D. & E. Wollheim, T. DiLauretis, S. V. Johnson. Feminist items.

FanCon, c/o The Alliance, Box 1865, Panama City FL 32401. 6-8 Mar. At the Ramada Inn.

CoastCon, Box 6025, Biloxi MS 39532. (601) 374-3046. 13-15 Mar. Jerry (Mote in God's Eye, Lucifer's Hammer) Pournelle, Geo. Alec (Relations) Effinger, Jo (Diadem) Claton, W. Pini.

UpperSouthClave, Box U122, College Heights Station, Bowling Green KY 42101. 13-15 Mar.

MarCon, Box 2583, Columbus OH 43216. (614) 497-9953. 13-15 Mar. Andrew J. & Jodie Offutt, Bob & Anne Passovoy. This con is legendary among long-time fans. Intimate atmosphere.

SwannCon, c/o Conf. on the Fantastic, Coll. of Hum., Fla. Atl. Univ., Boca Raton FL 33431. (305) 395-5100, x2538. 18-21 Mar. John Barth, Brian W. Aldiss. Academic conference.

LunaCon, Box 204, Bkln. NY 11230. Hasbrouck Heights NJ (near New York City), 20-22 Mar. James White, Jack Gaughan. One of the oldest cons seems to have found a suburban home.

FoolCon, c/o JCCC, Overland Park KS 66210. 3-5 Apr. Kurtz, Cherryh, Asprin, Abbey, Kirk.

SatyriCon, Box 323, Knoxville TN 37901. 3-5 Apr. Andrew J. Offutt, Anne (Pern) McCaffrey.

YorCon, c/o Burns, 48 Lou Ave., Kings Park NY 11754. Leeds, England, 17-21 Apr. UK phone: Leeds (0532) 721478. 32nd annual British EasterCon. Watson, Langford, Thomas M. Disch.

BaltiCon, c/o BSFS, Box 686, Baltimore MD 21203. Hunt Valley MD, 17-19 Apr. John Varley.

CineCon, c/o Binns, 305 Swanston, Melbourne 3000 Vic. Australia. 663-1777. 17-20 Apr.

ElectraCon, Box 1052, Kearney NE 68847. 24-26 Apr. Ed Bryant, S. Carnival, D. Patterson.

WesterCon 34, Box 161719, Sacramento CA 95816. 4-6 Jul. C. J. Cherryh, Grant Canfield.

Denvention II, Box 11545, Denver CO 80211. (303) 433-9774. 3-7 Sep., 1981. C. L. Moore, C. Simak, R. Hevelin, Ed Bryant. The 1981 World SF Con. Join before rates rise again.

WesterCon 35, Box 11644, Phoenix AZ, 85064. (602) 249-3111. 2-5 Jul., 1982. Gordon Dickson.

ChiCon IV, Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690. 2-6 Sep., 1982. A. Bertram (Rim Worlds) Chandler, Kelly Freas, Lee Hoffman. The 1982 WorldCon. Go to other cons to prepare for WorldCons.

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ON SCIENCE FICTION WRITING WORKSHOPS

by Darrell Schweitzer

art: Tim Kirk

The author, Mr. Schweitzer, is 28, B.A. in Geography, M.A. in English and an assistant editor of this magazine. He attended a Clarion Workshop in 1973; since then he has sold 50-plus stories, three novels, and edited The Ghosts of the Heaviside Layer, *a volume of previously uncollected material by Lord Dunsany.*

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Rumor has it that there is no science fiction fan anywhere in the world who hasn't at one time or other wanted to be a science fiction writer. Actually this rumor is not correct. I know someone who has no desire to be a pro. I think he should be carefully preserved by the government as an endangered species. But for the rest, I'll answer certain questions which always come up. "How do I get to be a writer?" Answer: you write. "How do I get published?" Answer: you send the result to an editor. "Do I need an agent to get published?" Answer: no. Somewhere in the course of this progression is one more. "How do I find out about science fiction writing workshops?" (Subquestions: "Are they any good?" "What goes on at one?")

Ah yes, the answer to this takes up an article. Science fiction differs from other fields of literature in this country in that there is considerable contact between writers and readers. They are part of the same social fabric, and this fabric regularly, you might say, drips new writers out between the threads. How? There is a long-established tradition of helping new writers. The fellow who jealously guards the "trade secrets" is not well thought of by his colleagues, and usually doesn't know what's what anyway. H.P. Lovecraft tirelessly coached his literary friends; and some of them, like Frank Belknap Long and Robert Bloch, have made good. Ray Bradbury, when he was first starting out, sought and got help from the professionals he knew.

I must hasten to add at this point that the science fiction community isn't utopia. Certain realities are in force. You can't expect every professional to help you; and, *especially* you can't hand a manuscript to a famous writer you don't know and expect him to criticize it for you. Famous writers must protect themselves against nut-case lawsuits. You know: "I gave Dr. Asimov a story with a robot in it, and he published *I Robot,* so he *stole my story!"* It costs money to get even so feeble a case thrown out of court. That kind of thing is a nuisance. People like that are the swamp leeches of the writing life. And the truth of the matter is, your idea was probably not worth stealing. (We will take this up in a moment.)

If you want professional writing help, you go to Clarion, which is the Platonic archetype of workshops for would-be writers, of which all others are faint shadows.

The Clarion Science Fiction Writers' Workshop was founded by SF writer and teacher Robin Scott Wilson. The first one was held at Clarion State College in 1968; and the name stuck, even when the workshop moved elsewhere. Wilson took some techniques that practicing professional writers used on one another at Damon

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Knight's (invitation only) Milford Conferences, and performed quite an innovation by applying those same techniques to amateurs. The result was something quite unlike those things which are advertised in the general writing magazines as "writers' conferences," at which the only real writers present are the visiting lecturers who may give a couple talks during the weekend, and may or may not give any of the hopefuls individual attention. The success rate, measured in the number of attendees who become published writers, is not very impressive. That of Clarion, comparatively, is spectacular. Some of the more famous Clarion alumni include Vonda McIntyre, George Alec Effinger, Lisa Tuttle, Edward Bryant, and F.M. Busby. Some of the selling writers from the Clarion which I attended (Michigan, 1973) include Alan Brennart, Carter Scholz, Jeff Duntemann, Robert Borski, Daniel Dern, George Ewing, and myself.

The secret of Clarion's success, or of any workshop, is an attitude. The old nose-to-the-grindstone approach. Writing is hard. Most of what you write early on is very, very bad. You'll do no one any good by babying them. You do not "plan to be a writer" or talk about what you intend to write. In my experience there is no transitional stage between not writing and writing. You *do*. At a Clarion you are expected to write (once, to solve a low output problem, Harlan Ellison demanded a story a day), and you are expected to approach your work like a professional. Excuses are not accepted.

This is the most important thing you can learn about writing. The rest is experience, refinement of technique, and self-discovery.

The basic Clarion setup is roughly as follows: The students pay a fee (about $1000) for their upkeep for six weeks, during which time they live together in a dormitory, and write, and write, and write. Stories are photo-copied and made available for everyone to read each evening. Every weekday morning there is a three-hour class, presided over by the week's visiting professional. (These have included some of the biggest names in the field.)

Now we get to the most important part, which can be reproduced anywhere, without $1000 and a dormitory.

The class sits in a circle so all can be heard. The manuscript of the story being criticized is passed hand to hand. Each member gives his or her opinion of it in turn, during which time the author is not allowed to say anything. Then the visiting professional gives his or her evaluation of the story. Then the author can say something.

The essence of any workshop is criticism. It can be tough. It *must* be tough if the story in question merits it. If you don't have a hide like a rhinoceros, you had damned well better develop one. You will

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need it in the give-and-take world of publishing. You must learn that your words are not sacred. They are the product of a *craft,* and since you are a beginner, your product is probably defective. (Otherwise you would be selling regularly already and would not have asked about writing workshops.) In the same way that a painting instructor can tell you that your perspective is off, or your composition draws the eye away from the intended center of interest, a writing instructor can tell you that your continuity makes no sense, your flashbacks render the story incoherent, the expository lumps stop things dead, or even that your brilliant idea about the planet in the Earth's orbit on the other side of the sun where the clocks go backwards is too hackneyed to be worth bothering with.

You must be willing to face the fact that you can pour your heart and soul into a story and the result may still be unpublishable, meaningless rubbish. If you cannot develop the objectivity to look back on some of your old stories and appreciate just how bad they are, you'd best get out of this line of endeavor. Ray Bradbury once said that a good writer has a million bad words in him, which he must write first. When Bradbury had typed his millionth, he piled them into a heap and had a bonfire.

This sounds very harsh, you protest; more like something an Army boot camp instructor would say. Indeed, Clarion is a kind of writers' boot camp. Army boot camp produces soldiers with great efficiency, while writers' boot camp produces writers. Another way in which science fiction differs from the mainstream in this country is that the science fiction writers start earlier. First sales in the late teens are common. By the time one is 35, the SF writer is in mid-career. The mainstream or "literary" writer is just getting started, if he has gotten started at all. He has no place to turn to and is working in a smaller, more restrictive field, where there is no tradition of helping the newcomers. Whenever I meet a would-be "literary" writer, I offer my condolences. I have yet to meet one who has sold anything. I suspect that the workshop concept, as practised in science fiction, has a lot to do with this difference.

If you want to learn more about Clarions, read the four books which have come out of the workshop, *Clarions* 1-3, edited by Robin Scott Wilson (New American Library) and *Clarion SF,* edited by Kate Wilhelm (Berkley).

But, as I said, Clarions are not the *only* way. You can do it on your own. Clarions tend to reproduce themselves, like mushrooms giving off spores. Graduates organize their own workshops to keep themselves in shape, and others, who did not go to Clarion, become

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involved, or hear about it, and start their own. I have been involved in three informal writing workshops, from which I think I can make a few general observations.

First, you reach potential members through some previously existing structure, such as your local science fiction club. Probably the workshop should not be a function of the club, just something which partially intersects with it. Meet once a month or every six weeks, whatever works for you. Too often and nobody has finished anything since last time. Too infrequently and you lose continuity.

As with any other mutual-interest group, a workshop needs a leader who makes sure that there is a place to meet, that dates are set, that refreshments are provided (if desired), etc. Otherwise everyone will agree these things need to be done and wait for someone else to do them. The leader must be careful not to set himself up as an authority figure and play petty dictator, expecting his opinions to be taken more seriously because it's *his* workshop. If there is a professional involved (someone selling regularly, not someone who has sold one story), he or she might want to take a teacher's position, as the visiting writers do at Clarion, or maybe not.

Put into the workshop only finished stories. This forces members to *finish* things, an essential discipline. Nobody sells fragments.

I would recommend a fairly formal structure, like that used at Clarion. Otherwise there is a great inclination for the workshop to break up into smaller discussion groups or turn into a party. If you have fragmentation problems, try having everyone read their stories aloud. Not only does this demand everyone's attention, but it assures that everyone gets through every story. Also, reading aloud is a useful exercise because you *hear* your prose. A sentence which sounds awkward and tortured probably is. Once you have become a professional, the ability to read aloud to an audience is a useful skill.

If you prefer to read, rather than listen to the stories, every author should provide several copies. Everyone should read everything, and keep quiet until all are finished. Then criticism, in turn, with minimal backtalk from the author, lest two people get stuck on a long argument/discussion to the exclusion of all others. If you find it necessary, set a limit on the time which may be devoted to a single story.

When criticizing stories, you are running over someone's exposed and tender psyche with hobnailed boots. A few rules should be observed:

1) Criticism is not inherently negative. Simply saying, "This is

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garbage," in however many words, is not criticism. It is abuse, which has no place in a workshop. The most important thing is *why* the reader reacted the way he did. Why he liked it is equally important, if he liked it. You must be as specific as possible. You tell the author that the characters are uninteresting, or that the plot logic seems strained, etc.

2) Criticism is not, must never be, a personal affront. Anyone who becomes hurt and offended when someone criticizes his story, however severely, is not ready for a workshop situation, will probably become a disruptive force, and should be eased out.

3) Criticism must not be an ego-trip. Anyone who gets his gratification from tearing apart other people's stories is likewise not ready (mature enough) for a workshop situation and should be eased—or firmly booted—out. On a similar note, beware of what Clarion instructors call the "little fat boy" phenomenon, whereby everyone keeps picking on one person. Remember you are dealing with people. Small group psychology applies. There are endless pitfalls of this nature, most of them more serious at Clarion because of the intensity of the situation, but they can crop up in your workshop too.

4) Criticism cannot be dogmatic. There is no absolute right or wrong, and all theories on the subject need to be taken with a grain of salt. Try to concentrate on storytelling technique, since that is, apparently, the only part of writing which can be taught.

5) Learn to take everything with a grain of salt. Sometimes the person criticizing your story doesn't know what he's talking about. In such a case, politely thank him for his comments and ignore them. But if the whole workshop reacts the same way, they are probably on to something. Pay more attention to the professionals. Not all professionals are good teachers; but if you're unpublished, any professional knows something you don't. Often half-professional, half-amateur workshops run into problems because everyone tries to treat everyone else as equals, and they're *not*.

6) Take taste into account. If you like hard science stories and someone is writing mystical, creepy-crawly fantasy, this does not mean he is necessarily bad at it. If you deride material of a type you don't happen to like, the member may sell the stories you say are terrible, and thumb his nose at the workshop. This is bad for morale.

7) Listen and learn. If you're not willing to do this, what are you doing in a writing workshop?

The main reward of a workshop is feedback. Unlike the main-

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stream writer who doesn't have this tradition, you aren't working in isolation anymore. Other viewpoints are extremely helpful sometimes. Recently I showed a story to a workshop primarily because I wanted to know if a middle-aged, previously married member found my middle-aged, married characters believable. At 27 and single, I was not in a position to say.

If you are doing something wrong, it helps to have someone tell you. Better yet, several people. Clarion takes in talented people. Anyone willing to devote the time required to participate in a workshop probably shows more than average talent. What the success rate really means is that these people get where they're going a lot *faster*. By yourself, you might go on doing the same things wrong for years. You will learn what your problems are. This is worth the effort alone. You might even learn something in the way of a solution. Maybe not. In any case, the *attitude* you picked up in the process of searching for this solution is the important thing. The surest sign of literary growth comes when you look back on what you wrote a year ago and *know you can do better now*. There is no other way to become a professional.

Some books of interest to workshoppers:

The Science Fiction Handbook by L. Sprague de Camp and Catherine C. de Camp. Owlswick Press.

Science Fiction Writer's Workshop I by Barry Longyear. Owlswick Press.

The Craft of Science Fiction edited by Reginald Bretnor. Harper & Row.

The Technique of the Selling Writer by Dwight V. Swain. University of Oklahoma Press.

Periodicals:

Locus (P.O. Box 3938, San Francisco CA 94119, $12.00 a year) is essential as a source of information about what is going on in the science fiction field, markets, editorial changes, and some workshops.

Empire (Box 967, New Haven CT 06504, $6.00 per year) is a science fiction version of *Writer's Digest,* featuring how-to articles by major professionals; market reports; and an extremely useful feature in which an amateur's story is published, then criticized in detail by professionals.

SF And Fantasy Workshop, a "forum and classroom for aspiring writers" (Alan Bechtold, 8125 S.W. 21st, Topeka KS 66615, $8.50

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a year) is part of an interesting attempt to set up a workshop through the mail. The newsletter consists of articles by professionals, organizational material, and a feature in which professionals answer questions from the readers. Subscribers participate in all the activities of the organization. It is possible to subscribe to *Empire* and *Workshop* jointly by sending $13.00 to the *Empire* address.

If you are interested in the Clarion Workshops themselves, address inquiries (and enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope when you do) to: Clarion Workshop, Michigan State University, East Lansing MI 48824.

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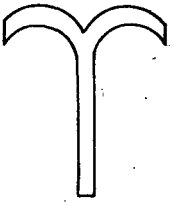
THROUGH ALL YOUR HOUSES WANDERING

by Ted Reynolds

art: Wayne D. Barlowe



The author is currently working on a fantasy, eight novelettes, and a novel; he assures us that we will hear from him again.

Quiet brooded over the cold-darkened land eastward. Low over the horizon stretched a bar of heat, dimly visible. The air was utterly still.

Thomas Simmons's roots gripped the uplands soil tightly. Restlessly the tree opened and closed his umbrella, testing its operation. As, minute by minute, the far border widened, lightened to the ultraviolet, pressed upwards relentlessly into the dark sky, Simmons began to sense the objects in his nearer environment, and strained to make out more.

The growing warmth broadened across the land, and the eastward slopes began to draw out of the night chill. Simmons stood at the crest of the low pass through the hills to which the tree had sped his course the day before. Downslope to the east lay a free blow of several kilometers, hindered only by a scattering of gray snappers. Sensing his presence, they had drawn a loose cordon across the lower pass during the night. Simmons could see the dull sheen of their backplates as they waited for him below, among the brittle stalks of night-growth.

Still the mounting light spread. The first warning puff of breeze eddied about him, fluffed his leaves, caught fretfully at his half unfolded umbrella. Simmons prepared himself for the sunrise.

Further off down the slope past the crouching snappers, well beyond where the pass opened onto the plain, a huge dome raised a wide arc, shining vermilion in the opening dawn. It would cover most of the slice of land Simmons could hope to pass. The tree observed it, seeking the best way around it. He would have to angle left as sharply as possible.

Topping the farthest horizon, the rim of the sun cut a vast swath

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across the borders of his perception. Round and violent it arose, its boiling surface too hot for him to observe directly. From the horizon rose long lines of glazed vapor, drawn explosively upwards towards its irresistible thermal summons.

And with an abrupt explosion, the dawn wind struck like a stone. It hummed and shrilled through his branches. Feeling his roots give, Simmons planned his course once more and then, as the hurricane reached crescendo, retracted roots and spread umbrella to the storm. On the instant he was swept downslope toward the waiting snappers. Gauging his feint precisely, the tree sideslipped gradually, tacking towards the snapper on the farthest left of the pass; when only a few hundred meters away, he spilled air from the leading edge of his umbrella, spun rapidly to the right, collapsing all branches and drawing them in close to his trunk, and was whipped on the gale past the snatching pincers with centimeters to spare.

Safe, Simmons extended the umbrella again and drove on before the dawn wind. Behind him he perceived, amused, that the snapper that had missed him had, in its eagerness, overreached its center of gravity; the dawn wind had caught it and was hurling it down the slope from ledge to ledge, fragments splintering off into the air at each rebound. *Stupid snappers,* Simmons thought, and forgot them, looking forward to the next obstacle.

The ground fifty meters beneath him had vanished in a seething broth of dust, small stones, bits of night-growth swept up before the shattering dawn wind. The sun had not yet cleared the horizon; but the storm would drop shortly, he knew, as abruptly as it had begun. The dome extended too extensively across his line of flight to tack by completely, Simmons realized, thinking rapidly. He should, to be safe, try to clear the dropping arc of the dome at as low a point as he could manage, so that less harm would result from a drop if the wind broke before he was past it.

But on the other hand, the thought came to him unexpectedly, *if I aim for the very highest point of the dome itself . . .* The tree began to flex the corded muscles that controlled the umbrella.

Wait a moment, thought Simmons, *that's crazy. That's two hundred meters up. A fall from there would kill me.*

He tried to jockey the umbrella back where he wanted it, but his limbs wouldn't respond.

I know what I'm doing, said the tree. *Be quiet and enjoy the ride.*

Who are you? asked Simmons. *I thought this was me.*

I don't know who you *are,* said the tree, *but you're certainly not* me. *You're some sort of free-riding passenger. I noticed you in me*

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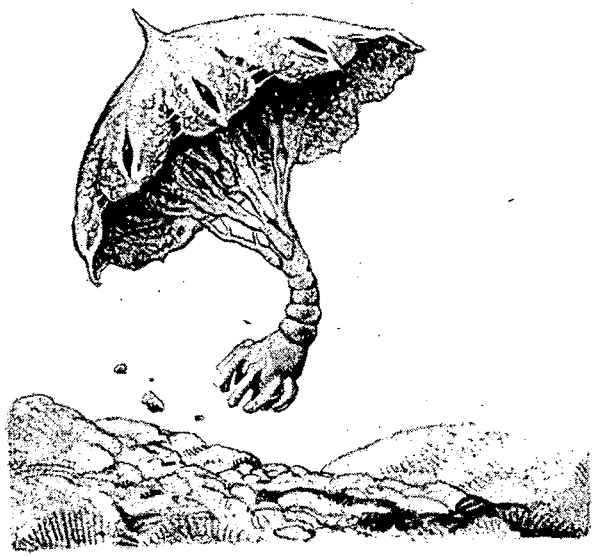

for the first time this morning.

The umbrella pitched to hold the tree on a direct course for the peak of the dome. It was rising higher and higher above the plain, which now skimmed by far beneath its roots. Scattered boulders loomed through the haze spun up below, and the flung matchwood of night-growth smashed by the dawn wind. Closer and closer drew the purple dome.

I really thought this was me, Simmons repeated tentatively.

No way, thought the tree. *I've always been me. Look, I don't mind your being along, but this is going to be cutting it pretty close; would you mind keeping quiet for a bit?*

Simmons quieted and watched the approaching mass of the dome speed towards them. He was extremely perplexed, and more than a little nervous. As far as he knew, this was the only body he had, and the only senses he was familiar with; if *they* weren't his, where *were* his? The only memories he seemed to have were umbrella tree memories; for example, that a dome such as this, perhaps to be met with only once in a dozen times around the world, was set up by non-tree creatures from some other world, beings so incurious about their adopted surroundings that they never emerged from their shells. How could he remember things if they weren't his own memories? It didn't seem quite right, somehow.

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Just because I share my memories with you, the umbrella tree was saying to him off-handedly, *doesn't mean they're* yours. *Now keep your thoughts quiet, or we're both of us in trouble. Or have you forgotten what will happen if I make a mistake up here?*

Simmons thought about that, as quietly as he could. If the dawn wind broke before they reached the dome, or on the other side before they could drop to a lower altitude, they would end up as kindling. He followed the expert maneuvers of his pilot with a certain amount of personal concern, feeling the subtle play of guiding muscles up through every branch and twig, as the tree played the wind for their lives.

It was timed perfectly; just as the skimming roots passed over the rounded apex, the cyclone shattered, and the tree plummeted a mere score of meters, striking the far curve and sweeping down the side, plunge broken, to land upright on the soil a few meters from the dome.

Beautifully done, Simmons said in relief after a moment. *Really lovely work. I don't think I could have done that.*

You're telling me? thought the tree, a bit smugly. It was already striking its roots down through the loam. *I've been looking for a break like this. Now I'm planted to the leeward of the best windbreak I've seen in my life. With any luck I'm protected from the dawn wind. I've wondered what it would be like to stay in the same spot a few days. Now maybe I'll find out.*

The air beneath the now warmly tinted sky was fragrant with useful tastes. A rivulet of delightful effluvium ran out from the nearby dome. Simmons could already feel the tree's taproot begin to imbibe healthful material from the undersoil.

Can I stay here with you? asked Simmons. *At least till I find out who I am? If you're really sure I'm not you.*

It's not really up to me, said the tree with a certain lack of concern, being quite taken up with its new surroundings and prospects. *It seems to me like you're already leaving, though.*

Simmons felt it then, a certain rarefication of his senses, an unravelling around the edges of his perception. His presence here in the umbrella tree was indeed beginning to appear highly problematic.

But then, thought Simmons desperately, *if I'm not you, who* am *I?*

I don't know, thought the tree. *But I suggest you find out. You can't really get down to* anything *till you know who you are. Good luck.*

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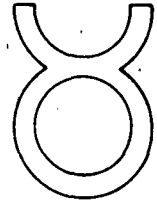
Simmons tried to hold on; but he felt himself slipping out, the feel of the delicately woven leaves fading first, then the finely articulated branches; and then, drawn from the close awareness he had shared with the tree, he was split off from the complex central nexus of the only being he knew. He passed, grieving, out from the body he had thought his, and the cold took him. If this was not death, it was very like it.



The man in bed stirred slightly. The figure beside him leaned forward intently.

"Can you hear me, Tom? Are you all right?"

The eyes of the man in the bed did not open. Faint words emerged from his mouth.

"But who am I? Who am *I?*"

"You are Thomas Simmons." The auditor spoke quickly, clearly. "Can you hear me?"

The man's head tossed very slightly from side to side. "I know *that*," he said with a touch of asperity. "But who *am* I?"

And abruptly his body froze, all motion stopped; and wherever Thomas Simmons was, he was not in that body on the bed any more.

He was somewhere else.

One thing seemed clear. He was no longer a guest of the umbrella tree. Whose guest he might be he did not yet know. Or, hopefully, perhaps this time he was himself. That would be a relief.

Through his senses of vision, touch, and pressure came conflicting messages which confused him. He tried to sort them out. He was pressed heavily upon some solid medium, while a more viscous one flowed past him. There was, however, an obliqueness to his position. Colors swelled, merged, and broke, fleeing in one general direction. He tossed these elements back and forth, trying to let them cohere in a comprehensible pattern.

There was here none of that immediate and effortless identification with body, environment, and memories, that had led him to

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believe he was himself the umbrella tree. His host's inner mind, assuming there was one, was still opaque to him.

Curved limbs extended before his vision, cupped with octopoid discs. These were methodically clamping to surfaces and slowly pulling forward the body in which he had found himself. Yet he himself had no connection with the volition which moved them.

Hello, thought Simmons carefully. *Is anyone there?*

No response from his presumed host. The extremities continued their slow weave, found a surface to their pleasure, adhered to it strongly, and propelled the sprawled body forward a few centimeters more.

The movement was crosswise and upward over a flattened metallic surface. The skatelike torso was being pulled up after the clinging tentacles like an overloaded gunny sack. About ten centimeters of liquid with a strangely heavy heave to it was lapping the body, washing on down the slope. Again the limbs reached out, and pulled once more.

Can you hear me? asked Simmons. *Hello, there.*

No response; although somewhere Simmons sensed an odd susurration, a rising and falling pitch, slowly pacing the movement of this body. The creature, it seemed, was humming at its work.

It was moving up a meter-deep groove in the slope, testing and touching the walls as it ascended. It reached a spot where the side of the trench was wet with beaded droplets, an incipient metal melt. The tentacular limbs lingered on the spot for a moment. Then one reached back to a pouch between humped shoulders to extract some pinches of powder. Several layers of this were rubbed carefully over the weakened layers. Then, with the same slow persistence, the ascent continued.

There was a slight shuddering felt through the surface up which they were crawling, and the host drew itself together momentarily, huddling. A rushing from above, a sudden build of pressure, and abruptly they were bathed completely with a drench of warm liquid, draining from above. This new fluid preserved its level, refusing to mix with the earlier liquid.

The humming stopped, and at last the slow thoughts of Simmons' host came ponderously up. *As expected. The Flelt has melted. Soon will come the melting of the Rayl metal. The final test of my channels. So far, so well.*

It heaved itself up another short distance, and came to an abrupt halt, quivering with a new thought.

But the Flelt metal is not flowing straight down the slope as it

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should. It flows in part from the western quarter. That is not expected.

It huddled into itself again, considering.

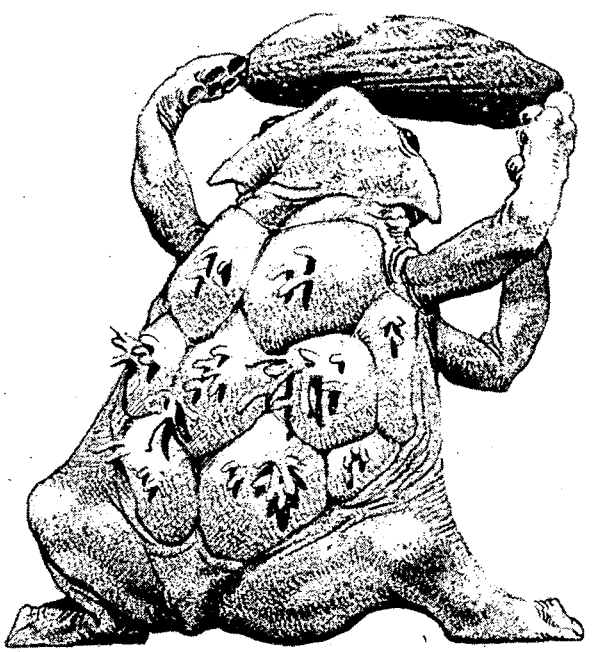
If the mass of Rayl also slants down from the west, it may breach the walls of my channel. That would prevent the proper downflow of melt. But I have often checked the westward rise. What can be diverting the flow?

Don't ask me, said Simmons. *I seem to be just along for the ride.*

The host, absorbed in its own meticulous thoughts, was oblivious to him.

The upper portion of this channel is almost certainly in fair order. I checked it the day before. But this new divergence can spoil my whole plan. It must be sought out. Yes, I must examine the westward rise.

It turned weightily to the side of the trench and lifted its grasping limbs to the top of the bank. With one strong pull it raised its whole body to the top of the channel bank. Here it sprawled, again half out of the flowing metal, scanning the upward slope for anomalies of vision or pressure.



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There is something up there that should not be, it thought. *It is a wall, an unwanted embankment.*

It paused to consider a moment.

The melt pushed aside by that barrier will breach my channel banks. I shall have to destroy it rapidly.

It inched up the slope, observing the barrier as it neared.

Yes, it is all Gurjek and Krohn rock. It will not melt. This is not natural. It is a thing that has been done, and I must undo it.

Reaching the barrier, the host began to grip portions of the wall with its powerful limbs, and exerted pressure backwards and forwards, dislodging the material and rolling fragments downslope.

A wide enough breach here, it thought to itself, *and the melt will flow through, and not pile up against my channel.*

There was a sudden surge of pressure through the atmosphere and, an instant later, through the surrounding fluid; although not detectable in auditory terms, it was indisputably an angry roar. Thought from another source followed immediately, cold, heavy, and directed.

You will **not** *destroy my wall. You will desist at once:*

Simmons's host methodically dislodged another large chunk of rock and flung it downslope before turning lumberingly to its left. Approaching from that direction was another creature; and, assuming similarity of species, Simmons saw that there was far more complexity and heft to his own hindquarters than he had been able to see yet. Behind the flattened head and the grasping forelimbs rose humps and hollows of hardened armor, each with its own array of tiny manipulative limbs and organs. It was a landscape in miniature. It had the appearance of inertia embodied. And it was very angry.

You will not touch my wall again, its thoughts boomed around them. *You will be cast in small pieces down this slope yourself.*

This wall cannot stand, said Simmons's host, unmoved by the approaching menace. *It destroys my downslope preparations.*

It makes mine possible, said the other. *Move from here, that I may rebuild your desecration.*

I shall not move nor desist, said the host. Simmons could feel the strain of muscles in its hindquarters as subsidiary feet braced its body more firmly to dodge or charge at need. *My needs are essential. I have a plan that must be fulfilled.*

Your plan is of no consequence, stated the newcomer flatly. *In the unlikely event that you are not impervious to reason, I shall shortly, and only once, explain. This wall protects an area of this slope from*

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the coming melt; within the shelter of this wall lie structures, completed by myself over the past season, which must be protected from the incipient melt and refreeze. No one has had such a plan before; I have had it, and shall fulfill it. Now go.

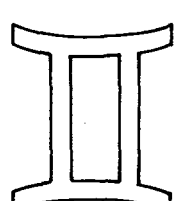
Retracting his shoulder blades, Simmons's host projected a long spike from his upper anatomy. It thrust outward toward the other like a standard.

Trivial, it thought. *Such petty protected domains, I hear, are common in the luxury lands. Now I, in the improbable hope that it may sway you to retreat and preserve your unnecessary existence, will explain to you that I have a plan which is one indeed. One which your trifling wall is endangering. Downeast from this point I have, with care and forethought unexampled, prepared a series of channels and sluices, fully constructed of the unmelting materials, leading to a complex of formed molds. The melt shall follow these channels, enter these molds, and refreeze to their forms. From them I shall retrieve implements, tools and apparatus to cut and dig and build through the whole cold season, to form larger structures and molds for next melt. No one but I could have formed such a mighty plan, and no mere cretin like you shall disrupt it.*

Enough cant, cried the other. *Prepare a rapid plan for meeting your demise, for it approaches.*

Boys, boys, cried Simmons, or something like that; but he was just not on their wavelength. The two began warily circling each other in a slow dirgelike tread. From far above on the slope there came another, far stronger shuddering, and the feel of something terribly heavy and totally massive plunging downwards towards the warriors. Their stomping shuffle was not interrupted, but Simmons imagined that the fight was going to be broken up pretty soon. He was awfully afraid the Rayl had melted.

Simmons was not displeased to find himself parting, being withdrawn from this scene. Parting he certainly was; he was being pulled from his temporary lodging by unimaginable forces, and tossed carelessly out again into the lonely wastes of non-identity.



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Simmons's eyelids fluttered open; and the auditor was beside him instantly, smoothing the hair on his forehead.

"Take it easy, Tom," she said. "You've had some kind of an accident, but you're in good hands. Don't talk unless you feel up to it."

Simmons's eyes stared at her awhile, and then moved on to examine the rest of the visible room in slow wonder. Finally, after seeking other forms of communication which seemed to be unavailable in his present state, he stumbled into speech.

"I don't suppose this is me either," he said. He fell silent.

His auditor was uncertain of his meaning. "I think you'll be all right now," she said carefully. "Just don't strain yourself. We've been worried about you for hours."

Thomas looked up at her again, wondering how long he would be able to stay in this world. "I don't know the purpose either," he said slowly.

"The purpose of what, Tom?"

"That is what I do not know," he said.

And with a rush, he was drawn inexorably away by the wash of the tide that held him, leaving a tenantless body on the bed.

There was no need or chance for choice of destination for Simmons. He was not sure if he was being reeled in by a one or a many, but whichever, it was united in taking him over. It/they seemed pleased to have him. He was being maneuvered into position, set up, plugged in, turned on. He could sense nothing but the fact of the manipulations until, like the snap of a switch, there he was. Not that *there* had much placeness to it; there was no sensory data that he could isolate, no body, no environment. There was only the knowledge that he was in proximate juxtaposition to a very volatile them/it which was quite aware of him, and very eager to communicate.

Hi there. Well, if those weren't the words, or if there weren't words at all, that was the very idea. *Glad you could make it. Someone new in town. How've things been going for you?*

Simmons felt himself surrounded by cheerful back-slapping joviality.

Casting about for some form of organ for communication, he found none; but his response came through anyway, and seemed understood. *Not too hot, I guess.*

A shame. Well, he's all right now, he got here, didn't he? Mind telling us who you are?

This was not the perfectly tactful question at this point. *Well, I'm*

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not sure, managed Simmons. *I seem to have been more than one . . . person, recently.*

Don't worry about it, the friendly presence(s) said reassuringly. *Isn't it obvious he's got a memory leak? No harm in asking, is there? Just give us a quick rundown on what you know.*

That wouldn't take long, said Simmons wryly. *I'm not sure I know anything at all.*

A mercurial laugh ran about him. *Then he's certainly come to the right place. We know a bit of something about everything. Just ask it, you've got it. Hey, pal, what are friends for?*

Simmons gave up searching for body or senses that obviously were not available to him. *Then you could probably be a great help,* he started. *If you could give me an idea . . .*

Say, are you Fendrian? Crastite? Floxine? I'll bet he's a Chrondoseer; look how mixed up he is!

I haven't the slightest idea what *I am,* said Simmons. *Really.*

That's simply fantastic, said his auditor(s). *Someone check it out. Can we get a fix on this one? Take a few circuits off the Grondel border. Can we spare them? Sure, this is a real find. Tell us what your gig is.*

It took him a moment to realize the last was directed at him again.

I don't know who I'm supposed to be, he said again. *Or what I'm supposed to be doing. Or anything. I'm hoping you can help me. Who are you?*

Just us, tossed off the voice glibly, a single intonation through all the plural repartee. *He's not from anywhere around here. Not within a gross of parsecs, at the least. Boy, but he must be a wide-open TP pickup for sure. Can we get a directional reading on his source? Not yet, give us time, will you?*

Simmons roused himself to break into the steady, self-interrupting stream of words. *Hey, look, you seem to know a lot more about this than I do. Can't you give me some basic background or something? It sure could help me out, the way I am now.*

Why, sure, pal. You look like you need it. Ask questions, that's the only way you'll ever find out anything. Wherever he's from, it's pretty nearly dead in towards the galactic core from us. Could he be from the Shaft civilizations? Hey, buddy, are you from anywhere near the Shaft?

I don't think so. I don't know what that is.

Hey, you are *in a bad way. Someone with* your *pickup, anywhere in that way, should have been able to tap into the Shaft like crazy. Look, we already told you his memory's leaked. Wait, did we check*

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for deceit? Of course, first thing, do you think we're asleep? He's sincere then. Just ignorant. Chances are he won't stay long; he's on a swing cycle not under his control.

Simmons's temper reached snapping point, and he surprised himself by the rage of his scream. **Will you shut up a minute!**

There was a sudden silence in his mind.

Simmons collected himself. *Look, if I don't have much time, let's use it. You tell me something, then I'll tell you something, as long as I'm here. Okay?*

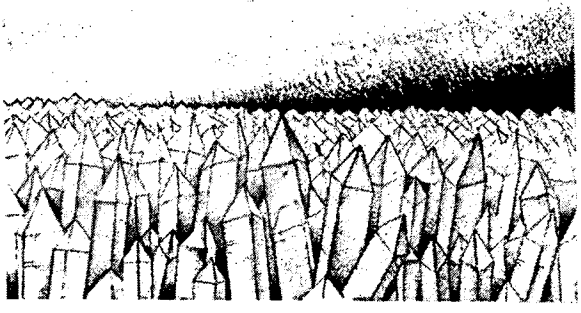
A short pause. *That makes sense. Well, that's what we've been doing, isn't it? Of course it is. He didn't have to interrupt. We forgive you, you don't have the education; not your fault. Look at this readout, he's not from the Omphalos. Hell, we knew that, he's from in towards the core. Look, friend, where were you just recently?*

If you'll listen, I'll tell you. Just a little while ago I was a couple of hours on a planet so hot that metals melt and freeze like ice.

Get that? Right, sounds like Menkar inner-planet stuff. That would make sense, if he's cycling counter-clockwise. He may make the Omphalos yet. Did you notice his thought of freezing ice—that pins down his home world type pretty narrowly . . .

Simmons raised a mental shout. *That's right! Ice is* natural *to me, and melting metals aren't. I must be from . . . No, wait, the dawn storm seemed quite natural to me too, at the time.*

Dawn storm? The voice mingled with excitement. *We don't know that one. Tell us . . . Oh-oh, we've got trouble along Grondel. Full*



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force to the border, and step on it. The voice cut off abruptly.

Simmons waited awhile, surrounded by silence and nothing else. At last he thought cautiously, *Hello? Are you there?*

The voice answered, more subdued than before. *Partly,* it said. Then, *You're that involuntary mind-switcher, aren't you?*

Wasn't it you I was talking with before? asked Simmons.

Probably, said the voice. *Almost certainly. But I wanted to ask you a question.*

That figures, sighed Simmons.

It's like this, said the voice. *We gather you've been in the position of having perceptual senses, right? Could you maybe tell us what that's like? We've never been able to get it straight.*

Senses? You want me to describe what they're like?

If you could.

Simmons considered briefly. *My experience is short, but it seems to depend on the body one is in. Maybe you are aware of differences in thermal distribution, or optical wave length, or pressure gradients . . . whatever. And whatver it is, it's translated into a spectrum of qualitative differences with a . . . with a special feel to them.* He was pretty pleased with himself. It was the first time, in several hours of remembered existence, that he had thought something out and explained it, and it felt all right.

But the **feel**, the voice persisted. *That's the part we don't get. What's it* like?

Tell me what you're *like, first,* asked Simmons, adding, *I think it's your turn for answering.*

I'm . . . just us, said the voice. *Most everybody else we come across seems to have senses, but they can't get the feel across to us.*

Do you have . . . bodies? asked Simmons.

How should we know? inquired the voice. *I'm not aware of any, but, if you're right about senses, we might have them and not know it, check? There was a visitor a very long time back who claimed, while he was talking to us, to be standing in the center of a plain filled with millions of crystals, sparkling and shining, he called it; and he thought they were us. But we're not sure; I think it may have been his idea of a joke. Anyway . . . wait, you're beginning to slip away! Can we hold him? Against the Omphalos? No way, you've got to be kidding. Hey, fellow, come back any time, we've a lot to ask you; we never did get where you're from. Look, there's a new thought construction at Malerithon, hurry . . .*

Simmons found himself deserted and disconnected even before he was drawn away.

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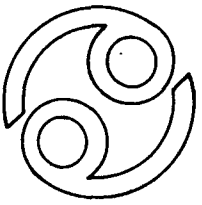

Simmons's eyes opened again. A look of bewildered surprise came over his face.

"I've been here before, haven't I?" he asked. "Where is this?"

The same woman was still beside the bed. "You're at home, Tom. We brought you right here from the lab. Do you know what . . . ?"

"What's happening to me? What's going on?" asked Simmons in a rush. "Tell me everything, what it all means."

She brushed the hair back from his face gently. "We're still trying to figure it out, Tom. You've been slipping into a series of strange comas all evening. The main thing . . ."

"Why am I? What's the reason for this nonsense? Tell me everything you know."

"There's plenty of time, Tom. The main thing is to keep quiet. You seem to be getting better every time you come out of your comas. Do you think you could eat . . ."

Simmons pushed himself up in bed with arms he had not realized he had until that moment. "Do I belong here? Is this my body? Can I stay . . ." He froze a long moment, head tilted up towards the other, and then slowly his gaze fastened on a corner of the ceiling, but an infinite distance beyond it. His lips parted.

"The Omphalos?" he asked in surprise, and his elbows gave way.

The woman leaned over and felt his pulse. Turning, she beckoned to the doctor across the room. "He's gone off again," she said.

"The cycle remains constant," said the doctor. "Just about two hours."

The woman looked down at the figure molded by the bed linen. "Call me in just under two hours, then," she said.

She took three steps, collapsed in an armchair, and in seconds she too, in her own way, was gone.

Simmons's first panicky reaction was to hold his breath, which was patently ridiculous. If his new body hadn't been adapted to its environment, it wouldn't have been alive to receive him. Still, he filed the incident under his growing collection of possibly important

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clues; it could be that *he* did not come from a totally water-breathing organism.

The muddy bottom upon which he wallowed stretched away in every direction until it vanished in the murk. Sight was soon swallowed up by that gloom. To compensate, he appeared to possess a very useful ability to pinpoint the location and texture of objects at fairly great distances from the patterns of flow in the currents about him. He allowed his body to observe his surroundings, and in turn observed those observations.

Uncouth plants trailed quiet fronds through the slowly stirring water. They did not show great complexity, and he felt they were not as intelligent as the other plant he had known, the umbrella tree; but he kept an eye on them. With the other eyes he noted squat structures in the middle distance, slime-coated and blunt-edged, which might have been constructed or perhaps just came that way. Here and there over the flat bottom rested unmoving dark rocks of all sizes. These he regarded curiously, feeling that he himself now resembled a rock, but they preserved their immobility.

Simmons tried to move, but found it impossible. There seemed no muscular response to anything he requested of this body, which seemed a hell of an unlikely survival setup for any creature. He was confined to his senses, which included neither mouth nor ears that he could locate. There was only the heavily concentrated feel of his own body, the limited sight, and the detailed picture built up by every nuance of direction, pressure, temperature, and salinity of the passing currents.

He focussed again on the scene before him, and wondered. Surely that nearer rock, downslope from him, had moved some distance. Not directly towards him, but it was certainly nearer than it had been. He watched it a while, but it didn't stir.

There was something familiar about some of this, far down beneath that part of his mind which he could read at all; the gentle sway of the water-plants, the drift of the murky water, the squelch of the mud along his sides. On the other hand he was certainly not familiar with this body itself. He could dredge up no image of what he might look like.

He was sure now that the rock had moved again while he hadn't paid attention to it, angling obliquely towards his nearer left. He centered his perceptions on it, determined not to let it evade him again.

Nothing happened for a long time. Then, far off to his right, he perceived the abrupt eruption of a large bubble, rising rapidly up

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through the water. His eyes would not move, but he sensed it soaring upwards, trailing long tendrils, from several of which dangled heavy objects resembling mud-encrusted boulders. It rose and vanished in the distances above.

Simmons twitched at the realization that the nearby "rock" had arrived, unobserved, at a position only a few meters from him, and was observing him stonily. From this distance it appeared less like a mere rock; Simmons supposed that he could now guess what he himself looked like.

The body appeared clumsy. The upper portion bulged outwards like a guzzler's abdomen over a too-tight belt. The face, as marked out simply by the three eyes, was wide and full; the eyes were, incongruously, a vivid and penetrating blue. The full length of the creature's sides and back was lined with numerous fringes or cilia which swayed delicately in the currents.

Simmons, in the absence of any known speaking apparatus, pondered how to communicate. He tried to blink significantly, then to ripple his own presumed cilia, both without success. What a useless

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body this was. He could do nothing with it.

A thought entered his mind. *Go home. You don't belong here.*

Simmons mentally cuffed himself for forgetting that telepathy was possible. He left it to his bodily reflexes to speak, while he provided the concepts.

I was just wondering whether I do belong here or not. Are you quite sure I don't?

The creature shuffled nervously through the ooze, a few centimeters this way and that.

Not here, not here! You're some sort of thing from outside. Now get out. You're bothering the family.

I can't go home, protested Simmons. *I don't know if I've even got one, much less where it is if I do. I don't know how I got here, or how to leave, either.*

Likely story, said the other grumpily. *That's what they all say.* It settled itself into the ooze. *If you refuse to leave, then just shut up. I'm not in the mood.* It shut its eyes, and the feelers along its sides subsided into stillness.

There was a long pause. Simmons wasn't sure what he could gain from further conversation anyway. Presumably he would eventually switch bodies again. If it turned out he had to stay here, he could reopen discussion at that time.

But he couldn't hold to that resolve. He needed information. He remembered *ask questions, that's the only way you'll ever find out anything,* and before that, *you can't get down to* **any***thing till you know who you are.* He hoped it was good advice; it was all he had.

He awakened thought channels. *I'm really sorry to trouble you,* he thought, *but you see, this is my situation,* and in one burst of recollection he poured out his remembered life of the last few hours, a torrent of images and feeling without words. He noted a thread of self-pity in the flood which he had neglected to perceive in himself until it had been objectified. Am I as unstrung as all that?, he wondered.

The creature's eyes snapped open, and it solemnly regarded him for a long moment. Then it sent out a cry.

Hey, Mama. Mama!

From nowhere, a large rock loomed up downcurrent from Simmons.

Don't shout so, Zeef. Your daddy's working.

But there's another invader in Corrlee. A very peculiar one.

So? That happens often enough. That's what Corrlee's for, isn't it, Zeeferry?

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But this one's in trouble, said Zeeferry. *Listen, Mama,* and the whole content of Simmons's experience was spilled in an instant into yet another mind.

Simmons waited while the new arrival digested the information. Then she turned her bright blue eyes towards him.

Well, sir, you do have troubles, don't you?

I **have** *been thinking that,* admitted Simmons.

I wish we could help you, said Mama, *but I don't really see how. It's about all we can do to keep the Omphalos in order, without worrying about all you odd creatures out there somewhere. But I do hope you find your way home all right.*

So do I, chimed in Zeeferry. *Imagine, not even knowing where you belong. I'd go stark wild!*

Would you like a bite of something? asked Mama. *That, at least, we can give you. None of your previous hosts have even thought of that, more shame to them.*

He can't eat, Mama, said Zeef, sniffling in sympathy. *He's a botch baby.*

Simmons wondered that he didn't feel more surprise to be squatting here on a sea bottom being offered chicken soup by a couple of boulders. Chicken soup! Where had that swum up from? He added it to his file.

The most help you could give me is information, he suggested.

Mama was silent a moment. *I really shouldn't tell you much about the Omphalos,* she said at last. *We like what we've got here, and don't care to spread it all over. We've had quite a few invaders in Corrlee's body, though most of them knew where they were from, and what they were after. You wouldn't believe the odd and often quite unpleasant things that have sat right where you are now, sir. Things that want to take us over, or steal our heirlooms, or make us build stupid things for them, or devour us for food, or change our opinions . . . it's terrible.*

She sounded frightfully depressed.

It must be hard on Corrlee, thought Simmons, feeling about without success for any traces of prior occupancy.

Mama laughed, a mental trill that produced a contagious mental grin from Simmons. *Oh, there isn't really any Corrlee any more,* she explained. *She was a botch-baby, who would have died anyway. We just keep her life-functions working, boost her TP glands, and remove the rest of the brain. That way, any of you space-hopping monsters will turn up in one of them, you see, instead of one of us. And of course, sir, as they are quite immobilized, sooner or later they get*

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bored and go back where they belong. No successful invasions of the Omphalos, no sirree. She laughed right up the scale again. Like a lightning rod, thought Simmons, and then, thoughtfully, added *that* to his file.

It's quite kind of you to tell me all this, ma'am, said Simmons. *If you have such reason to distrust all outsiders.*

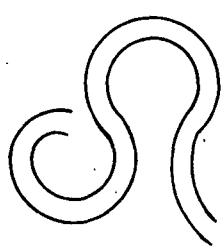
Oh, but you **shared,** said Mama. *You gave us all your thoughts and feelings, Mr. Simmons; how can we distrust you now? Not that we understand you very well, but now that we've read you, we have to respect you.*

There's not very much to read, is there, Mama? said Zeef. *He's only about seven hours old. That's even less than me!*

He's certainly far older than you, Zeeferry, said Mama patiently. *But something catastrophic happened to him a short time ago, and he lost himself. Now he has to start all over again. It's a real shame. Well, I'll do what I can. Here's something to take with you, sir, a small token of our good wishes for your eventual homecoming.*

And suddenly a flood of comprehension plunged into Simmons's mind. It was the totality of the Omphalos, the great bubble filled as completely with love and caring as with water; all gathered into a single wrapped image of comfort and home, of family and security, and fastened at the end with a neat little mental twist that would prevent him from ever letting it out to anybody else.

And in the moment of receiving that image in all its poignant beauty, Simmons was drawn away from the Omphalos on stronger currents, as irresistible as unseen.



Simmons came up weeping and the woman was right there holding him tightly.

"It's all right, Tom. It's all right. I'm here."

He reached out his own arms and held her, gasping uncontrollably.

"What is it, Tom? Are you all right?"

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He released her and dropped back on the pillows, his hands drying his eyes as naturally as if they were his own. He caught his breath.

"It was the Omphalos," he said at last. "It hurt."

She leaned over him, soft hand stroking the wetness from his cheek. "Talk about it if you want," she said. "Only if you want. We don't understand what's happening to you yet. But we're trying."

He looked at her and his eyes moved across her face as if at last he really was seeing her for the first time. "I've just been shown the Omphalos," he repeated. "An amazingly tight nexus . . . somewhere. A place to belong. A home." He tightened. "God, I want a place to belong. But not the Omphalos. That could never be mine; that's for someone else. There must be a place for me somewhere." He looked about, at the room, the draperies, the lamp, the fishtank, the clock.

"This is your place, Tom," she said with a quiet certainty. "You belong here. And soon we'll be able to keep you here. Each time you come back you stay longer. Eventually we'll have you back for good. Don't worry."

He was fingering the white sheets with wonder. "I wish I could believe it," he said, and then, looking at her again. "And you are . . . who?"

The quick twist of pain across her face was erased in an instant. "I'm an old friend, Tom," she said calmly. "You'll remember when you're well."

"So this is supposed to be my place, my world," he asked, flexing his fingers curiously. "This is presumably my own body?"

"How could you doubt it?"

"I've had so many worlds and bodies lately," he said slowly. "I'm not quite ready to trust this one yet. But . . . I do seem to keep coming back here. And I can't contact any prior occupant of this body . . . I'd like to believe it," he said again.

There was an odd look on her face. "Other worlds," she said. "Other bodies? Tom, just where do you *go* when you . . . leave here?"

He might have answered her, if he had still been around.

Simmons found himself in surroundings which eased him with their familiarity. The fact that he still could not remember his own proper environment, to which the sense of familiarity must refer, bowed before the relief of feeling he was in a world more like his own than he had seen in all the hours he could recall.

He was standing (standing! it seemed so natural) on stumpy legs upon what could only be termed a balcony overlooking what was almost certainly a city, and over him was a sky packed with what

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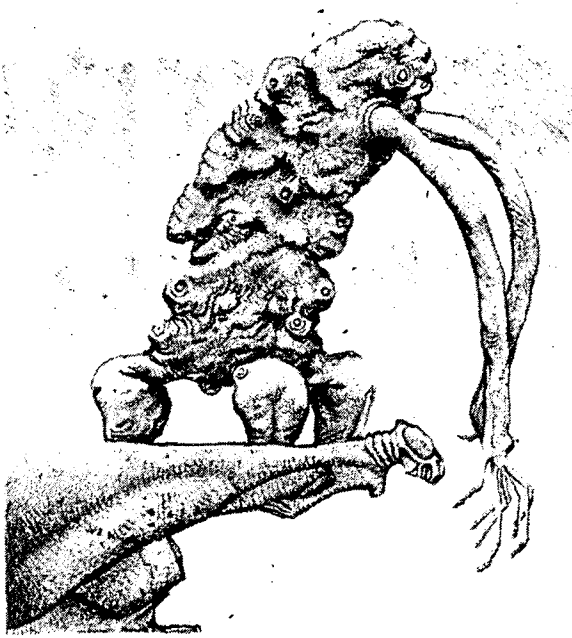

might very well be clouds. The slight differences (the bases of the buildings were more constricted than the apices, the predominant hue of the atmosphere was a redundant orange, and his body seemed to be thoroughly encased in bark) seemed relatively inconsequential in comparison to what he had been through lately.

The body in which he found himself, even if it did call to mind an overgrown tree stump, seemed one he could get used to. At least it was an individual.

His host was immediately aware of his presence.

"Well, isn't this a surprise? I do believe I have a guest. Welcome, sir. Can you read me?"

"Quite well," said Simmons. "Excuse me for intruding."

"Not at all, not at all. A pleasure, indeed. Allow me to introduce myself, alf-Quatr let-Mimas, court artiste of Phlange. Would you like to see some of my recent productions?"

Without waiting for the other half of the introduction, alf-Quatr turned from the balustrade and strode on rootlike peds through an oval doorway into the inner rooms. Here were shelves, tables and mantels cluttered with intricate objects of unclear import. Alf-Quatr

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paused a moment and then, reaching out an arm Simmons couldn't help thinking half a meter too long, removed an item from a wall niche.

"You like this, I hope? It's a throwaway, of course, but I think it has a certain charm. You see what I'm getting at, I suppose."

Simmons found it hard to focus on the wrought object, as his host, to whose visual apparatus he was confined, was not looking directly at it. It was composed of twisted filaments of some plasticine substance, filigreed into a climbing structure of uncertain significance.

"I don't get it," Simmons admitted. "I don't know what it's supposed to be." There were really other subjects he'd rather discuss while he was here.

Alf-Quatr let-Mimas snorted. "Supposed to be! You *are* an idiot, aren't you? See here, if you're a total ignoramus, you might as well go back where you came from. Nobody asked you here, you know."

Simmons found himself mentally backtracking from the force of the other's scorn. "Hey, I'm sorry," he said. "I just meant this is so different from anything I'm used to. I don't know how to judge it. I can certainly see that it's beautiful."

"It is, isn't it," said his host, mollified. "It won't take you long to get used to appreciating this. You're really quite fortunate to have chosen me for a patron. Some of these soi-disant artistes are content with quite shoddy work. Here, let me show you something a trifle more avant-garde." He picked his way across the crowded atelier. "This is a little thing I've been playing with off and on. I know you'll . . ."

Alf-Quatr was interrupted by what was obviously the mental equivalent of a knock.

"Not now," Alf-Quatr thought in irritation. "I have a guest."

"I am aware of that," came another thought petulantly. "And it is most ungracious of you to keep him to yourself. You know I wish to be informed of all visitants. Now pass him over."

"I protest, your highness," Alf-Quatr was hissing furiously. "This gentleman is a connoisseur of the arts, and has no interest in your political trivialities . . ." Somehow during this exchange, Simmons found his viewpoint switching. Alf-Quatr's atelier faded, and he was looking out from a stumpy body seated upon what, with all allowances for variations in culture, was a recognizable throne. From being his primary host, the court artiste had become a mere distant voice mouthing threats.

"Well, now," said his new host, severing the connection with the still sputtering Alf-Quatr with an airy mental wave, "now that you

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have been saved from that unparalleled bore, allow me to introduce myself. I am Khar-Naste let-Ragel, Imperiarch of Phlange, which, if you will allow me to say so, I feel I have built into one of the finest states, if not *the* finest, in all outer Ghornest. I trust you will permit me to give you a small tour of my domain . . ."

"Dearest," came a mental whisper from a new source, "do let me have a moment with the guest first. You know you promised."

The Imperiarch of Phlange stamped his peds on the dais in anger. "Will you lay off, woman," he lashed out. "Can I never have the pleasure of a state visit without the distaff side sticking in its superfluous oar?"

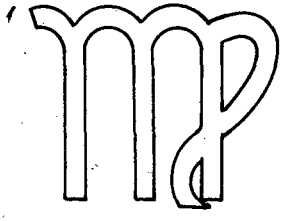
"How dare you speak to me like that, Naste, and in company? I've got a good mind . . ."

Khar-Naste cut communication abruptly, and slumped sulkily back into his throne. "She doesn't, you know. Have a good mind. Never did. But what a body; built like a glurch. We'd better be scarce for a bit till she cools off . . ."

At that moment the double doors to the chamber burst open and an infuriated Alf-Quatr let-Mimas appeared. He flung himself forwards towards the throne, waving a sharp and elongated implement of vaguely fatal appearance. The Imperiarch shot to his peds, grasping for a projectile on the wall behind him. Simmons found himself tossed helplessly aside, and hung a confused moment unmoored between hosts, before another mind grasped him and stealthily drew him away . . .

He was crouched in the sunlit corner of a courtyard, under the overhanging sweep of one of the inverted cone structures. Small agile limbs, the bark hardly formed, lifted an object before his new eyes. It was a small carved image of . . . well, it looked like a tree-trunk.

"Isn't dolly the most wonderful dolly in the whole big universe? I just bet you like her a lot, because if you don't . . ."



Simmons sat up abruptly in bed.

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"Tom. You're back, aren't you?"

He nodded, peering at her concerned features carefully. "I remember you."

Her face glazed with relief. "Thank God."

"Yes, you're here every time I pass through this damned place. If you can't do anything about my condition, I guess I'll have to. Get out of the way, please; I'm going to get up."

"Maybe you'd better stay put a little longer, Tom. It might not be safe . . ."

"Good lord, woman. Whatever is happening to me, it isn't sickness. Don't do me any favors." Then, looking at her stricken face, "It's not that I don't appreciate your trying to take care of me, but it isn't necessary."

He swung his feet out of bed and, with the precarious caution of a beginner, rose and took two steps. With a mild smile he stopped before her and made a slight bow.

"Allow me to introduce myself," he said regally. "Thomas Simmons, of many forms and many places, briefly here and at your service. I have been surveying the myriad lands of my realm and shall, for your pleasure, report to you upon their condition. As far as I am aware, none other has ever had the dubious honor of performing such progresses."

"Please, Tom, I'd rather . . ."

"But first, if you will, a bit of something would be appreciated. I presume, even in this forsaken corner of the universe, you creatures consume esculents."

She nodded, and reached for the phone. Picking it up, she spoke into the mouthpiece without dialing, "Send up some food. He's hungry," and replaced the receiver.

"Very good," said Thomas Simmons. "And now let me explain to you what the situation is. You see, I hop from world to world. I suppose it's not the usual thing to do, but I'm doing it. It's just a matter of time before I learn to control the procedure, and then, well, it will become a virtue rather than a liability. So don't worry about me, okay?"

"You believe you actually go to other worlds?" she asked in amazement.

"I'd rather you didn't even look like you're doubting me."

"But . . . could you be going telepathically?"

He looked at her in surprise. "What do you know about telepathy?"

"Well, that's what the experiment was for, Tom. You really don't remember? We were trying, for the dozenth time, to induce a tele-

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pathic state in you!"

He stared at her, considering. "Then," he said at last, "the experiment worked with a vengeance. I am now in telepathic communication with creatures light years off, on some random basis. Is this induction, by the way, something you know how to turn off?"

She shook her head at that. "But, Tom, if you are telepathic, you must know what *I'm* thinking. You couldn't get into the minds of creatures way out there, and not into human minds here on Earth, could you?"

There was a long pause as he looked at her, weighing her point, and then she just managed to catch him as he fell.

Simmons was paying closer attention to what was happening to him now. The new pull entered his mind with a definite jolt, far-off but unmistakable when one was attuned to it. For a few instants the new element was simply *there*, without content, and then it began to permeate his thoughts with a sense of authenticity which his human environment could not counter. *There* became more real, more vital, than *here;* and then here and there changed place. There was an instant in which the single pull enlarged, became multiplicated into a large number of smaller component attractions; and then his own mind, at some level he could not control, selected one, seemingly at random, and the others faded. The chosen attraction loomed and became *the* world. Multiplicity faded, and he was in a new *here.*

If any of that made the least sense.

He rested, and tried to survey his situation. His surroundings were confusing, but he had come to expect that; he would have been perplexed had they not been. But the amorphousness of everything, the ambiguity of these shifting flashes and glooms, did seem oddly familiar in its very surrealism. He didn't seem to have a body at all. He searched for a host mind.

When he located it, he understood. His host was asleep; the fragments which passed before him were scraps of dreams.

That was all very well for his host, but Simmons didn't have much time here, and didn't care to fritter it away in sleep. He strained for wakefulness, and felt his host stirring and struggling against him in protest. Simmons proved the stronger. He opened their eye.

An inner voice, still drowsy with interrupted sleep, was wondering what had woken him. Simmons ignored it, and explored his new senses and surroundings.

Sight: dim lighting, falling through translucent over-head panels

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into a domed and circular chamber. He was immersed up to his long jawbone in some cool liquid in ceaseless bubbling motion. Sound: a continuing susurrus of fluid flowing and falling; a gentle wind brushing the outside of the chamber. He sensed his own body, the long, easily bending coils resting in the liquid like a many-limbed salamander. The coils seemed so multifarious that he suddenly doubted they were all his own, and belatedly remembered to seek out his telepathic sense. There was someone else in the chamber with him, he realized, another sleeper, coils intertwined with his own.

The voice of his host, outraged and terrified, had been screaming silently inside him. He now listened to it.

What's happened to me? Am I mad or ill? Why am I awake when I should be asleep?

"It's all right," said Simmons soothingly, in control of things. "I won't hurt your body in the least. I'm sorry if I've disturbed you, but I shall be gone soon."

Currents, I **AM** *mad,* said the interior voice, and then, after a brief pause, broke out again. *You get out of me right now, you understand? Right now! I'm a decent glowl, I keep healthy, I work hard, you've no call to get into me like this. Now clear out.* There was a strong undercurrent of panic.

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"I'll be out when I'm out," said Simmons, as consolingly as he could. "Just relax and stop distracting me. Or tell me about your world and people; I need all the information I can get." He flexed himself, ascertaining how his stubby limbs-cum-fins could be used to propel him; it involved muscles lining the entire lengthy hose of a body.

Stop wiggling me! cried the other. *Have you no sense! No shame! You'll WAKE THE WIFE!*

Simmons shrugged, a more impressive gesture in this body than in his previous one, and glided out of the wife's coils. He made an investigatory circuit of the room. It was a pleasant change to be in control for once.

The chamber was ringed with louvered window slots. Through them he could make out, through night gloom, an extensive sea. The chamber seemed a capping turret atop a high tower in the midst of the waters (or acids, or whatever). He could dimly glimpse islets in the distance, as well as what might be two other far-spaced towers, and thin dark lines running towards them, perhaps low causeways.

Pushing his host's head out the window slot, Simmons looked back at his tower. Water was being pumped up to this height, where it bubbled in the turret and then flowed down the sides of the tower into the ocean again.

There was a stirring in the pool behind him, and an increasing sense of wakefulness from his sleeping partner. He drew in his head again. *Oh, newts,* came from his host. *I warned you. Now I'm in for it. Will you please, please get out and let me try to handle this!*

Across the chamber, the other creature opened its large scarlet eye and gazed reproachfully at him. A tightly directed communication, revealing no more than necessary, came to him.

Why are you wakeful in sleeptime, Tideraker; are you ill or mad?

The interior ego tried to assume control and failed. It whispered desperately. *Demon, tell her . . . tell her a change in the sound of the osmotic pumps woke me.*

Simmons managed to produce a rather ragged directed beam of thought. "Esteemed wife of my host, I am a random visitor to your charming world, and find myself for a brief period encapsulated inescapably within the mind of your worthy spouse. Pray forgive any temporary inconvenience this visitation may cause to eventuate." It seemed impossible for him to produce less effluent conversation with this mental communication apparatus.

The wife eyed him steadily for a long moment, and then oscillated her upper torso in what he identified as a knowing nod.

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Mad, she said. *I thought so.*

"Your husband is not insane," said Simmons, "merely temporarily incommunicado. You deal at present with a creature who, though alien to this place, bears no intention of ill to you or yours."

I must inform the authorities, she mused abstractedly. *The sooner the better, for all concerned. Oh, Tideraker, how could you?*

Deep within, Tideraker's thoughts were raising a mournful chant, all about how could this have happened to *him,* who had always kept his mind alert and his scales polished and his morals scrupulous. No help there.

"I am of the hope that you do not in precipitation bring woe upon your husband, who is totally without responsibility for my present occupation of his august person," suggested Simmons wryly. "By the time authorities have arrived, I myself shall long since have departed."

The wife gave him a sullen stare and then slithered to a cluster of paraphernalia along the far wall, where she occupied herself with the local equivalent of making coffee. *If there were truth in that mad contention,* she tossed off indifferently, *it would hardly absolve my husband. To allow himself to be possessed by some monster freak from outer space hardly smacks of a proper guarding of his own mental state, now does it?* She hesitated, neck fin poised with a small scoop over a metal vessel. *Are you having coffee?* She didn't think "coffee," but that was what she meant.

"Why not?" said Simmons. The wife flipped the scoop over, and stirred the resultant mixture.

Now, she said, returning towards him, her upper torso protruding sternly from the pool, gazing at him eye to eye, *Tideraker, it is not too late for me to retract the call to the authorities. But you know in that case I must have assurances from you, as to your future conduct. I must think of our status and our nestlings. For myself, I do not fear, of course, any possible behavior of yours.*

"What kind of assurances?" asked Simmons. "Out of curiosity merely."

Inner shout. *Holy currents, she'll want the cash and the keys!*

I want the keys and the cash, said the wife.

Give them to . . . no, don't. Oh, how did I let myself get into this? moaned Tideraker.

You must realize, said the wife, *that if this does get out, I will be severely blamed by association. You know I had hoped for more rapid advancement from you. Now that you are mad . . .* she shrugged, *you realize I will have to be given full power to keep it quiet, and handle*

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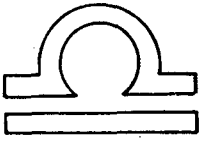
the nest in my own way; or else have you turned over, so I can re-establish. It is hard, because I really do love you, Tideraker, but . . . she sighed, *what else could any decent wife do?*



Simmons's first words on his return to Earth were, "I'm sorry."

There were others in the room, moving quietly about him; one handed him a sandwich. But his eyes were on the woman.

"I behaved rather unpleasantly to you the last time, I believe. I only hope you understand the strains that I'm under."

"That's all right, Tom. I do understand."

"No, but it was inexcusable. It won't happen again. Now, what are we going to do about me?"

A broad-faced man appeared beside him. "Hopefully, you're coming out of it yourself gradually. Six hours ago, you were hardly rational."

Simmons glowered. "You should be rational under what I've been through? Do you understand that I've actually been in six alien bodies, seven if you count this one, in just . . . how long?"

"About twelve hours," said the woman.

"We're beginning to believe you have," said the man. "And we'll want to hear all about them, eventually. It's just a surprise to be working on telepathy, and stumble on space travel. Well, astral projection."

The woman laid a hand upon his arm. "We hope that's right. It's such a relief to find it isn't a matter of physiological . . . or mental . . . breakdown."

Simmons looked from one to the other, and suddenly realized that he had accepted them as his kind. For better or worse, and until shown otherwise, this was his world. At least it was something he came back to. They have to take you in.

"We figure that if you really are picking up telepathic races out in the stars somewhere," the other man was saying, "and no human thoughts at all, it can only mean that humans just are null telepathic senders. It takes both senders and receivers for contact, and humans aren't either. We seem to have made you a super-sensitive receiver, and you still can't pick up human thoughts."

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Simmons took a meditative bite of the sandwich in his hand, and discovered a yet unnoticed sensory capacity of this body. He liked the taste.

He spoke to the woman. "I'm afraid I've had to think of you as merely 'the woman' up till now. You do have a name, I suppose."

She bit her lip. "I'm Debbie. Deborah Simmons."

"Oh." He thought. "Not a sibling or something?"

She shook her head.

"Oh," said Simmons again. And then, "Say, look, Debbie, I am sorry. It will all come back to me, it's got to."

"Better get back to bed," said the other man. "Judging from past experience . . ."

"Oh, no," groaned Simmons, "I was just getting to like this place! You mean I'm about to go off again?" He let himself be led back to bed, still protesting. "What did I do to deserve this kind of treatment? I didn't ask for it, I don't want it. Someone else go world-hopping for awhile, huh? Why can't I just stay home decently, and get to know my home and Debbie again and . . ."

The complaints sputtered out somewhere in the void.

Once again Simmons found himself in an unformed void prepared for yet another alien birth. Ages passed, while he strained for senses.

Is anyone here? he thought, and the thought receded from him in all directions, passing on without echo into the distances. There was nothing to sense with, nothing to move.

At the worst, he decided, he'd be here in nowhere for somewhat over an hour, and then return to his own body . . . if that human one was his own. No, no more doubting; he had accepted the human role as proper to him.

There was an abrupt sense of shining motion, as of a streak of light running past him, and then flicking off as rapidly as it had appeared. "Yo!" said Simmons. "Someone here?"

There was a pause, and then another flash of light, slicing from one side of a newly perceived field of vision to the other with extreme rapidity. Then another.

"Wait," said Simmons. "I can't catch it."

The light reappeared, chastened to a lower rate; it turned and returned, like an array of marquee bulbs flashing on and off in fractional seconds, tracing out words before him in the blackness. "YO. CATCH IT. SOMEONE HERE. CATCH IT. YO."

"I can see words," said Simmons. "But I don't think we're getting very far."

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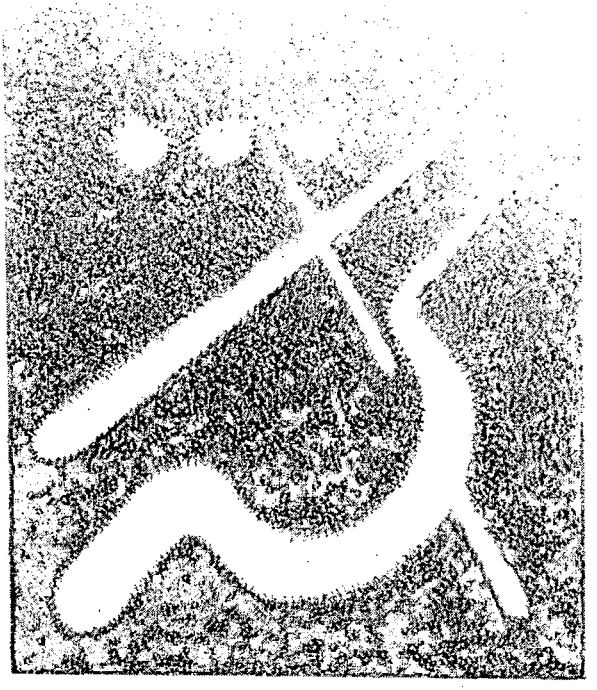

The light reformed. "DON'T THINK, DON'T SEE. THINK WORDS, SEE WORDS. CATCH IT. GET FAR. THINK WORDS."

"You can only see the vocabulary I've used," guessed Simmons, and the lights leaped in triumphant agreement.

"YOU USE VOCABULARY, I USE VOCABULARY. WE GET VERY FAR. USE VOCABULARY."

Simmons settled down to vocabulary. His communicant learned rapidly. Soon Simmons felt ready to broach his problem.

"YOU THINK PROBLEM, I THINK . . ."

"Answer, maybe?" suggested Simmons.

"I THINK MAYBE ANSWER, MAYBE I DON'T THINK ANSWER. YOU THINK."

This looked to be a useful discussion. Aware of his time limitations, Simmons ran through the main points of his predicament quickly, and was rewarded with a full three-second cessation of the lights.

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Then: "SEVENTEEN POSSIBILITIES NOTED. ONLY PROBABLE TWO, IN SHORT TIME WE TALK TO YOU. ON ONE HAND, YOU MOVE, BEYOND SELFWILL, IN JUMPS OF MIND TO MANY MINDTHINK PEOPLES."

"How does that work? And how can I stop it?"

"WHY STOP. CAN CONTROL, VERY MORE GOOD. WORK WAY MAYBE LIKE PROBABLE THIS."

The light went utterly wild, and produced a vivid rendering of a galaxy, spinning before him in silent glitter. Since each of those million unblinking stars seemed to be based on a stroboscopic flashing effect from a single moving light source, the motion of the point must have been rapid indeed.

Text appeared beneath the image. "OUR GALAXY," and then, with sublime understatement, "THERE ARE OTHERS."

"Uh-huh."

"IN LIGHT OF SORT YOU SEE. NOW, YOU SEE NOT MINDTHINK. IF SEE MINDTHINK, SEE GALAXY LIKE THIS WAY."

The Galaxy wavered and clamped into a new appearance. Most of the individual stars had winked out, but many sources shone more brightly, and the core glowed in close-packed splendor.

"SEE MINDTHINK AS LIGHT," blinked out his mentor. "ARE NATURAL PEOPLES MAYBE, PEOPLES' MAKE-AND-USE THINGS MAYBE . . . OTHERS. THIS MINDTHINK," a red pointer of lights darted about the stars, "VERY LARGE, LARGE CLOUD, PROBABLE NOT ALIVE THING, BUT THINK, VERY LARGE INTERESTING THINKS. HERE, HERE, MANY PLACE, NOT ONE PEOPLES, MANY PEOPLES, ALL NOT LIKE ALL; BUT ALL ONE MINDTHINK. OTHERS, HERE, HERE, HERE, HERE, ONLY ONE PEOPLES. BRIGHT IS LARGE THINK, NOT BRIGHT SMALL THINK."

Simmons was awed. He was trying to memorize as much of the Galaxy's layout as he could, but the complexity over-whelmed him. "Where are we now?" he asked. "And where is Earth?"

"MAYBE NOT CATCH," came the response. "YOU AS BODY NOW ON EARTH. WE MIND AND MIND MEET NOT IN ANY PLACE. BUT WE HAVE HOME PLACE HERE, SEE HERE, .67003% OUT FROM CENTRAL GALAXY. YOU ARE OF NOT-MINDTALK PEOPLES, NOT SEE HERE. NO MINDTALK LIGHT. BUT MAYBE PROBABLE CATCH WHERE. YOU GO TO OMPHALOS. WE KNOW OMPHALOS PEOPLES. HERE. SOME PEOPLES YOU MINDTALK TO, THINK YOU SOON GO TO SHAFT, MEAN CENTRAL GALAXY PEOPLES. SO PROBABLE MAYBE YOU PEOPLE ARE HERE." The marker slewed about a huge sector of the galaxy. "ON OTHER HAND, PROBABLE MAYBE NOT."

The Galaxy vanished, replaced by the schematic view of a planet rotating slowly upwards against a constellation-specked back-

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ground. A red cross appeared on the planetary surface, and the view moved with it.

"YOU HAVE BODY AND MIND ON PLACE MARKED RED. YOU NOT CATCH MINDTALK. ON SUDDEN, YOU CATCH MINDTALK, AND . . ."

Above the horizon of the turning planet, the starry background suddenly exploded into new glows and sparks and clusters of red light.

"YOU SUDDEN SEE MINDTALK, LARGE, SMALL, FAR, NEAR. LARGE MINDBLOW. YOU FORGET SELF, GO FROM SELF TO . . . YES, THANK YOU, TO AMNESIA. SAME TIME, MIND EMPTY AND SEEK SELF." From above the horizon rose a bright point source of light, eclipsing all others in that part of the sky, "VERY VERY LARGE MINDTALK COME. LARGE STRONG SELF, LIKE YOU SEEK. MAYBE TRUE FAR AND STRONG, BUT I THINK SMALL AND VERY CLOSE TO YOU. WE SELVES NOT NEVER MINDTALK UMBRELLA TREE PEOPLES."

Simmons watched in fascination as the planet before him continued to roll, and new stars inched their way into the sky. Suddenly a new point pierced from the horizon.

"YOU STILL SEEK SELF, FIND SELF NOT UMBRELLA TREE. BUT NEW MAYBE-SELF APPEAR TO YOU. YOU LEAVE UMBRELLA TREE, GO TO NEW MINDTALK."

Simmons watched the new explosion of telepathic light climb the sky. "And so I've been tossed like a frisbee from mind to mind," he said slowly, "as each new broadcast captured me. And after twenty-four hours I'll start to repeat, I suppose." He noticed something startling. "Where did you get that star pattern?" he asked quickly. "I recognize it." A part of his mind wondered at the kind of amnesia that could forget both self and species, but remembered constellations and frisbees.

"FROM YOUR MIND. PROBABLE STAR PATTERN AT TIME OF YOUR FIRST SEE MINDTALK. EXACT STARS WITH MINDTALK NOT KNOW, NATURAL. THIS PROBABLE MAYBE SUPPOSE COULD BE PATTERN OF MINDTALK PLACES, SEE FROM YOUR EARTH."

"That red star's Aldebaran," said Simmons. "That constellation is Taurus."

"SO IN YOUR MIND," said the lights. "YOUR MIND CALL PEOPLES YOU HAVE MINDTALK WITH IN SUCH VOCABULARY AS SERIES YOU KNOW."

"What series?"

"AS ARIES, TAURUS, GEMINI, CANCER, LEO, VIRGO. IN MIND YOU CALL WE LIBRA."

"No!" said Simmons. "No, it can't be as neat as that!"

"NO PROBABLE MAYBE EXACT RELATE ONE TO ONE. PROBABLE MIND-

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TALK PEOPLES EACH ONE SAME . . . YES, THANK YOU, SAME GENERAL LONGITUDE AS IN SERIES. NOW, ON OTHER HAND, NUMBER TWO PROBABLE POSSIBILITY YOUR CONDITION."

Simmons had forgotten there was supposed to be another. "What's that?"

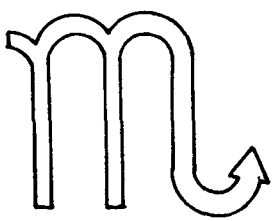
"YOURSELF IS NOTSANE. VERY STRONG PROBABLE. YOU THINK YOU GO STARS IN SERIES AS IN . . . NO . . . NO . . . YES, THANK YOU, ASTROLOGY. YOUR MIND SEE NOT-THINGS, BELIEVE NOT-THINGS . . . YES, THANK YOU, HALLUCINATIONS. NO SUCH THING ASTROLOGY, YOUR MIND FIND FROM NOTHING."

"You can't think I'm hallucinating *you!*"

"VERY PROBABLE POSSIBLE MAYBE YES. POSSIBLE MAYBE NO. ON OTHER HAND . . ."

The lights all went off, very abruptly.

"Libra? Libra, are you there?"



Simmons was alone again in the nothing.

"I think we've got it now," said Simmons suddenly, and every head in the room snapped about. A minute before, he'd been quite out of the world. Now he paced the floor rapidly.

"First, let's assume that my telepathic planet-hopping is an actual fact. The alternative is that I'm crazy, and I'm not about to buy that. Those places are as real as this one is. Anybody who'd prefer to think I'm hallucinating is welcome to work along that line, but don't tell me about it; I'm not interested. Next, the modus operandi makes sense. There are hordes of telepathic broadcasting stations out there; and I'm picking them up, as the world turns, one after the other, click, click, click . . . what's the matter, Debbie?"

She was looking at him in awe. "We're just off balance," she said. "One minute you're deep in coma, and the next you're spinning off points faster than we can keep up."

"I haven't been in coma," Simmons said shortly. "My body has been resting, while *I've* been getting a quick cram course in telepathic galactography. The situation is complicated, but we can han-

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dle it if we just think it through. The benefits are enormous. We have to, first, perfect this telepathy induction business, and just as important, find a way to turn it off. Eventually, we'll want to find a way to control it, pick up the stations we want. Meanwhile, we'll be getting information on the state of the Galaxy. Listen, there are arts and philosophies and sciences out there just waiting for us. This isn't a disaster, it's a vast opportunity. We're in a position now to listen in on the universe, from our safe little cubbyhole here on Earth."

"Sounds great," said the round-faced man, whose name Tom still didn't know. "But if all this stuff's going to flow in through you, we've got to take good care of our receiving station. We still aren't quite sure how we created it."

Simmons swung towards him. "What kind of experiment was it?" he asked. "Can we replicate it?"

"Brain surgery, drugs, hypnosis, all in a particular mix you worked out yourself, Tom," said the other. "We could do the same thing again, if we had another volunteer. So far, you've been the only person nuts enough . . . sorry, figure of speech . . . to try out your own concoction." He paused. "I don't know if what's happening to you will make another volunteer more or less likely."

"Okay. Look, everyone, think it out, think it all out. Brainstorm . . . on the experiment, on possible dangers, on those points I mentioned earlier. By the next time I come back here, I wish you'd have a list of recommendations about what we need to know. I may well come across minds out there which can answer them. Cancer, war, energy . . . space travel, if we still need it . . . all the answers are out there, and in a little time we'll have them."

"Tom," Debbie asked, "what's it like out there? You haven't given us a clue yet."

He smiled at her. "It's like all the mad science fiction ever written. Have a recorder ready when I get back, and I'll start setting down my travelogue. Okay, I'd better get on my back."

He lay back on the bed and smiled up at Debbie. "See you in a couple of hours," he said, and closed his eyes.

"I don't know what the hell to think," admitted Dr. Berkson. "Medically, there's nothing I can find wrong with his body. It's all in the mind . . . and you can take that either way you want. What's with this business of telepathic journeying, Art? Could that be possible? It's not my field at all."

"It makes a weird kind of sense," admitted Art Hover, pushing

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his spectacles up on his forehead. "It's absolutely impossible, of course; but that might not keep it from being the truth, I suppose."

"But what do you really think, Art? This is no time for your paradoxes."

"I'm afraid he's gone off the deep end," said Jim Lindland. "We've got to fish him back."

Deborah Simmons looked at the three men from where she sat by the deserted body of her husband. "He's not crazy," she said firmly. "I think he's telling the truth about what's happening to him."

The three men looked at her, and then spoke together more quietly.

Deborah looked back at Simmons. His eyes were open. There was a long pause. Then he spoke.

"Move off. I've got to get up."

"But you just left five minutes ago," she said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. But she got up from the bed.

Simmons stood up. Dr. Berkson started to say something and stopped.

"There is very little time to act," said Thomas Simmons in a flat voice, "and none to explain. Listen carefully. It is absolutely necessary to move me rapidly, in the direction countering the Earth's rotation, so that I will be above to preserve my present vector angle to the sidereal sphere. How do we do it?"

There was a stunned silence. Then Art Hover cleared his throat nervously.

"I don't think we quite get you, Tom. What are you after?"

Simmons frowned. "I thought I was very clear. I must travel . . . westward, at the rate of the planetary rotation. And at once. I'm counting on you to arrange the details."

"We can't do that," said Jim Lindland, and Dr. Berkson said, "Get back in bed, Tom," and then they both fell silent, as he looked at them.

Deborah spoke up. "They can't do anything unless you tell them why you need it, Tom. They haven't quite decided whether you're rational yet."

There was suppressed fury beneath his even tones. "I said there's no time to explain, and I don't like to repeat. Let's move!"

"We'll move faster if you give us a quick 'why,' Tom," said Art nervously, licking his lips.

Simmons's hands lay straight at his sides, but the fingers were flexing spasmodically. "Quickly, then. There'd be no chance for us at all, but for one extremely fortuitous fact; that there *is* no tele-

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pathically powerful civilization broadcasting from within this particular thirty degrees of longitude. That means that during this two-hour period, and only then, I am in control of my own mind. If we can *keep* me at this angle to the constellations, I'll be safe. And, more importantly, humanity will be safe. Now can we please get the hell on our way!"

"Humanity safe? From what?" asked Lindland.

"From the most insidious and total alien invasion you can imagine. Do you want to keep me talking here until it's too late?"

Art looked at Jim. "I don't believe it, I don't think we could possibly get anything in time, but I'll call the field and see." He left the room.

"If we can't manage it this time," said Thomas Simmons, "I want you to promise me this. Keep my body here, locked in at all times. Do *not* pay attention to whatever I may say at other times; it will not be Thomas Simmons speaking, but something so alien you couldn't believe it. Only during the empty vector can I operate freely, at this season between eight and ten in the evening."

"You can't be serious," said Lindland. "You can't expect us to believe . . ."

"The universe is a very ruthless place," said Simmons, "and it cares little what you or any man may believe. It *acts* while you are posturing and trying to make up your mind. Now, next, I want you to arrange for others to replicate my experiment. We need as many telepathic receivers as possible for human defense."

"It's not my decision, Mr. Simmons," said Dr. Berkson, "but I don't think you're likely to get many volunteers to follow you until it's clear what's happened to you."

Simmons crossed to face the doctor and looked directly into his eyes.

"It is immaterial whether they are volunteers or not," he said coldly, "as long as we get them." He stared till Dr. Berkson looked away, and then crossed to the window, and drew the curtain. He stood there stiffly, looking out at the night sky to the east. "Until we have at least one telepathic receiver placed within each thirty degrees of longitude, we are wide open to invasion, now that we have broadcast our presence to the Galaxy. We can't wait on niceties."

Deborah Simmons, standing behind him, looked out to where Antares brooded in the far depths of the night. "Would you guys leave us for a bit?" she asked. "I want to talk to Tom alone."

When they were alone, Simmons turned to her with a frustrated gesture. "*You* understand," he said. "I know you'll help me." He

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placed his hands gently on her shoulders, and looked at her with tender pleading. "You're the only one I can really count on to help me when it gets tough. You will, won't you?" Very slowly, he pulled her to him and kissed her for a long time, then held her to his chest. "You don't know how much I need you."

She held him a long moment, and then slowly pushed herself to arm's length and looked up at him. "I certainly don't want an alien invasion of Earth," she said.

"Then help me persuade them. I know what I'm doing, it's the only way."

"Kiss me again," she said.

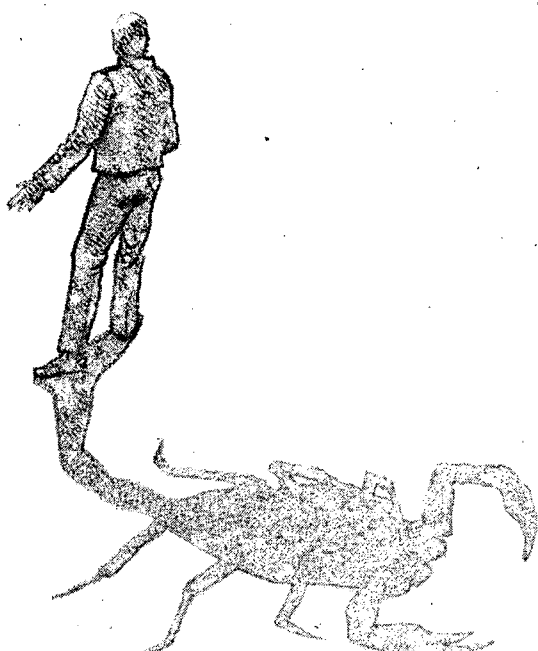
He did.

She finally pushed away from him. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'd do a lot for that sort of thing, but I told you. I don't want an alien invasion of Earth. I won't help you."

"But I told you . . ."

"I don't believe you. You're lying. And I've got to tell them that."

She turned from him and was stopped by his hand gripping her shoulder.



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"You are not going to make a fool of me. You will not say a thing to them!"

"I've got to. You know that. You've changed too much. I don't think it's you any more. You're a . . . an 'it,' aren't you?"

His hand squeezed and twisted, and suddenly she was on her knees. His other hand darted out and lifted the telephone from the bedside stand. He stood there above her, as she squirmed to release herself, the phone raised above her head, and his voice falling heavily upon her.

"But I told you, honey, you're not going to tell anybody anything!" . . .

and then he spoke again, gasping. ". . . believe it. Don't believe it. Don't . . ." He stood swaying for a moment, and then collapsed on the edge of the bed. There was a long silence, as he revolved the telephone in his hand. Finally he looked at Debbie.

"It wasn't me," he said.

She nodded silently, white-faced.

He gulped. "I've been trapped in here all this time, trying to shout out to you, to stop him. But his control was too great. I hadn't a chance." His eyes were pleading. "You do know it wasn't me?"

She was on her knees beside him, holding him tight. "Oh, God, yes. I know, Tom! Don't you think I can tell the difference? Thank God you're back!"

His look was still haunted. "The one thing he lied about was that so-called unoccupied vector. It's occupied, all right . . . by *them*."

"Who are they?"

"Who knows? Minds powerful enough to snap me up the moment I touched them, and ride back here. Ruthless enough to determine to take the world over. Competent enough to almost do it."

She sat there on the bed, arm around him, and he couldn't stop shaking.

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"You're going to have to knock me out with drugs or something at eight o'clock every evening, Debbie. I can't go through that again. We can't take the chance."

She ran her hand along his thigh and squeezed. "Remember what you said before . . . while you were still you. You'll find someone out there who knows the answer to . . . to *them* too."

"I better. But, Debbie, I'm scared. I don't want to go out again. I thought it was all worked out; there were friends out there, with knowledge and benevolence. Well, there are other things too, you see?"

"You'll make it, Tom. We're all with you."

He grinned wryly at that. "I'll travel a long way from your moral support. But I appreciate the thought." He subsided into a silence so withdrawn that she suddenly looked at him to see if he'd gone off sitting up this time. But he was still there. What he finally said should have surprised her.

"He was getting to you, wasn't he?"

"I knew it wasn't you, Tom. Almost right away."

"And he almost got to you anyway, right?"

She rose and paced, uncomfortable. "Tom, this is terribly confusing for all of us. Not like it is for you, but . . . you understand?"

"I understood how you looked at him when he was coming on strong. I was trapped in here, there was nothing I could do but look, and scream without you being able to hear. He almost had you, Debbie, you can't deny it." He paused, and then said quietly, "I gather it's been a long time since you got what you really wanted from me. Or have you ever?"

She ran to him with a sob, and caught his face between her hands. "Tom, Tom," she said tightly, "for heaven's sake, not jealousy! Listen, dearest. He was there, he was coming on like a girl's dream, he was *in your body,* for Christ's sake . . . and he *didn't* get to me. Because he was *not* you! Okay?"

Simmons put his arms around her, and pressed his cheek against her breast. "Okay, Debbie," he said at last. "Thank you. That's a nice thought to take with me. Because I'm afraid I've got to go to Sagittarius now."

And where the hell'd you *come from, Buster?* was the gist of the first communication. *Don't answer right now, this is pretty ticklish right in here. I'll be with you in a minute.*

It would be hard to be more *with* someone than he already was, thought Simmons. Talk about togetherness! He strove for a feel of

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his latest temporary lodging.

Hey, don't do that, came the cry of his host. *Leave those damn muscles alone. The last thing I need at this point is any extra twitches.*

Simmons subsided, and contented himself with passively observing his fresh environment through his new senses. The first entry into a new body in a new world was still a time of utter bafflement, and not being able to initiate motor activity made it almost impossible to differentiate between his body and the rest of his surroundings. He started shuffling his senses into some kind of order, trying to fit them together into a coherent situation. It was fairly complicated, since he had only his habitual subjective senses to fit quite other objective inputs into; what he decided to interpret in visual terms might be direct sensation of magnetic fields, and his aural readings might spring from a kind of sonar. And then it all would get too weird and inconsistent, and he would have to try again, feeling the magnetism and smelling the echoes. This kept him occupied for some time. Meanwhile his host remained busily engaged in affairs of his own.

Partway through this procedure, Simmons became inescapably aware of some*thing* which was making itself increasingly evident in all sensory modes. It was either growing, or nearing, or intensifying, in a manner he found unnerving, whether he took it as a steadily rising sound, a growing light, or an increasing stench. A quick extrapolation suggested that whatever it was, in a few instants it would be all there was. Its existence in that mode seemed incompatible with his own.

And then, in a Doppler switch, it had passed, and was again shrinking, or departing, or diminishing. Simmons would have slumped his new body in relief if he'd known how.

Then his host remembered him at last. *Touch and go for a moment there, wouldn't you say? Well, we're on the straightaway for a little while. Who did you say you were?*

"What was **that?**" Simmons managed to get out.

That? What? Oh . . . we just flashed a solar chromosphere. Fastest way out of the system, but sort of tricky getting it just right. That's why I didn't care to have you squirming.

Playing chicken with solar prominences? For sport? Simmons didn't ask. Belatedly he answered the other's question.

"I'm just a temporary visitor," he said. "I'm not totally in control of where I show up, but I'll try to keep out of your way, if you like. I won't be around long."

Oh, no need to stand on ceremony, said the other. *You're here, let's*

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share experiences, that's what minds are for. It's a way to the next system.

"Would you mind giving me a bit of orientation," said Simmons. "I'm having trouble figuring out just what is **you** and what is your . . . ship? Like, is that oscillating bar one of your appendages, or an external bit of apparatus?"

His host achieved the equivalent of a belly laugh; *every*thing flexed and shook. *It's all me,* he chortled. He gave a shake, and motion ran along his whole length, extensors raised, panels contracted, tubes pulsed, circuits flashed. *Just me. Whatever I couldn't move was stars.*

He was about thirty kilometers through his longer axis. He was his own spaceship. Simmons was impressed.

"I never imagined anything like you before," he admitted.

So how does it feel being so ignorant? said the ship, and then, sensing Simmons had taken offense, *Hey, I just meant it's been so long since we got out into the Universe, I'm just sort of curious about what it's like for you baby species, just sticking your snout out of the shell and all.*

Simmons let it pass. After all, the observation was just.

What's your effective range? the ship was asking. *You can't be from that system we just passed, I'd say. There were null life-readings, and anyway, your strength of presence isn't fading. Do you know if this is a first contact?*

"My first with your type," said Simmons. "Though I've contacted others."

Whee-oo, thought the other. *You must be from out of the cluster entirely. Hold it, another system coming up. Just hold still and don't wiggle anything.*

Another sun loomed up, at first gradually and then with that rush that would have stopped Simmons's heart if he'd been in charge of one at the moment. As it swept away behind them, their shared mind was occupied for an instant with a babbling confusion of incoherent images, feelings, and passions, which vanished as abruptly.

"What was that?" asked Simmons bewilderedly.

Oh, there was rather primitive life on the second planet. I picked up one mind from each species and flipped them all over to Central Process for assessment. Standard Operating Procedure. Of course, in your case, I mean, from out of the Cluster entirely, what's the need? You're a lot of fun, I admit, but the Cluster's our main concern, wouldn't you agree? Besides, you can be more help with me just now. If you don't mind pulling your weight, okay?

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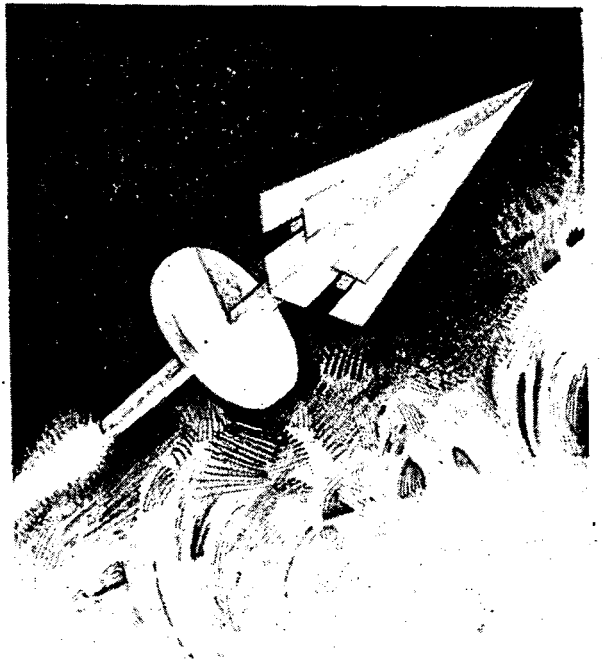

"Not at all, though I doubt I'll be with you long enough to really help much."

Oh, you're doing great, considering the sort of thing you are, admitted the ship airily. *Just make an entry in the log, will you?*

"Log?"

Oh, yeah, look. Feel what I'm doing here. This muscle (got it?) actuates the assessor mech. While it's open, flow in heat patterns like this; in this case, we want to mark that star, second planet, for recheck in about a megayear for further evolutionary progress.

"You do a lot of this?"

Got to. You know how many stars there are in the Cluster? By the time we get a look at all of them, it's past time to start over again. Don't know how the Core Shaft guys ever manage their area. Here we go again. Oh, great, this one's a trinary.

If Simmons had had eyes, he would have shut them the next five minutes.

When it was over, and the ship had straightened onto its next course, Simmons remembered to bring up an important subject. It

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was all very well to have fun out in galaxy-land, but his own little world was under threat; one he reluctantly had to admit he himself had brought upon it.

"I wonder," he asked his host diffidently, "if you could help me with a bit of a problem."

Fire away.

"Well, I come from a species of non-telepaths on some little planet out there, I really don't know where the hell actually, and we've just gotten in contact with some pretty tough customers." He sketched out the Scorpio menace. The ship was indignant.

Hey, look, I know that kind. They just get a pod in the door and take over entirely. Real pests. Look, there's only one way to handle that type, you know what I mean?

"How's that?"

Well, first, you let 'em start coming in. Meanwhile, you arrange for a mind transfer of your own people to some off-planet source . . .

"How are we expected to manage that!"

And then when they're all in *your bodies on home-planet, and you're all* out . . .

"Yeah?"

You blow up the planet. Whap! And they don't bother anybody again. That kind, it's the only way.

Simmons sighed mentally. "I don't think we could arrange that."

Your funeral, buster. Another star. Quiet, now.

The new star swelled and shot towards them. Simmons was almost getting used to the thrill of close passage. This time, however, things went a little differently.

Excrement, the ship projected suddenly. *Left! I meant right, right, right!* They plunged directly into the maelstrom and, as far as Simmons could tell, were evaporated instantly.

It would have been astounding, had not his capacity for such emotions been overloaded some way back, when he found himself squatting to his neck in a mud-filled box, looking out over rows of similar cubicles. Judging from their occupants, he was in a body somewhat between that of a toad and a lobster.

I meant "**right,**" his host said again, in a sadder tone.

Simmons thought a minute. "I have to assume that you are not *exactly* the ship, but the mental *manipulator* of the ship," he surmised at last.

What, old buddy, you still with me? Yeah, prime klutz that I am, I bunged up another ship, and it'll be days before they get me a new one. You don't think we'd risk intelligence itself out there, do you?

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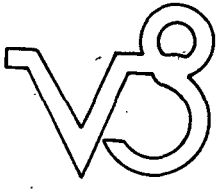
That's hardly necessary.

The erstwhile ship waited for a response, but the temporary guest had departed for parts unknown.

Easy come, easy go, it thought. *My, that was a queer one.* And crawling out of its tank, it set off to look for an unemployed ship.



"Oh, Tom. I'm glad you're out of it. You're just in time to tell these idiots why they can't just take you away. They want to incarcerate you or something."

Simmons sat up wearily. "For the love of heaven, can't a guy even enjoy his ten-minute break without asinine interruptions? What is it this time?"

Mutt and Jeff stood beside his bed. Mutt opened a wallet and flashed something inside it, just like he'd seen it in the movies. It could have been anything.

"Government," said Mutt. "For your own security."

"Get out of here, please," Simmons said, trying to stay polite. "Like I've seen governments you wouldn't believe."

"Sorry," said Mutt indifferently. "You'll have to come with us. Orders from the top." He got his dialogue from the movies too.

"I prefer not to," said Simmons. Eyes flicking towards Jeff in the background, he added, "And you can leave that in the holster. You won't be needing it. What's this all about?"

Debbie broke in. "Oh, Washington is about twelve hours behind on all this. They still think that you can read *human* minds!"

Simmons thought about that. "Oh. Of course. So that makes me a secret weapon, of course, and military security. And probably a political threat as well, right?"

Mutt's face didn't change. "We don't wish to use force, Dr. Simmons, but our orders . . ."

Debbie: "I've tried to explain to them that you can't pick up human thoughts at all, but they . . ."

"Please leave this to us, Mrs. Simmons," said Mutt.

"No, leave this to me," said Simmons. He looked at Mutt directly.

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"Tell me, sir, who sent you?" He paused for no reply. "I see. Well, then what do you *really* think of your boss? . . . Okay. Then I'll tell him when I see him just what you do think of him."

There was a short silence. Then Mutt said slowly, "You're bluffing."

"Oh? Then kindly think of your opinion of the average American voter . . . I see. Would you like *that* to hit the press? Now get out!"

Mutt stood uncertain for a moment, then turned to Jeff. "Maybe we'd better . . ."

"Hey," Jeff spoke for the first time. "You letting this creep get to you? Our orders . . ."

Simmons looked at him. "Hey, you, think of a woman you've been with recently. . . . Now think of someone you wouldn't like to know about her. . . . Got it! You try to lock me up, a lot of people are going to be getting mental messages about things you sure wouldn't want them to know about."

A minute later Simmons was alone with Debbie.

"My lord," she said in awe, looking at him as if he were again somebody else, "How did you get away with that?"

"Dumb fool luck, I guess," he chuckled. "The kind of luck that only works on dumb fools like those. Actually, I suppose I learned a few things from Scorpio."

"Scorpio?"

"My tag name for the monsters that tried to invade Earth two episodes back," he explained. "If nothing else, they have chutzpah, and that's what I needed just now. That won't keep the machine out of our hair long, though. Now I have to add a new item to my list; how to keep governments off. Well, someone out there . . ."

". . . will have the answer to that one. Right," said Debbie. "You know, now that I know you're not crazy, you're really going out there to those worlds, I almost envy you the experience."

"Don't," said Simmons. "Trail-blazing's no fun. You wait till I've scouted out the territory." He held out his hand and drew her to him. "Debbie, you'll be here next time I come back, you hear."

"Of course," she said, smiling down at him. "Aren't I always?"

"You, and no one else, either," he specified. "Let's have two AM privacy."

"I really think some of your memory is beginning to sneak back," Debbie decided. "I thought you had enough other stuff on your mind."

"Because of those Washington goons," Simmons pointed out, "I haven't even gotten out of bed this time back. And I don't intend

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to next time either."

YOU ARE ABOUT TO EXPERIENCE THE MOST PROFOUND TOUR IN THE UNIVERSE. WE ASK THAT YOU ALL REMAIN QUIET FOR THE NEXT HALF OCCAD, SO THAT EVERYONE MAY EXPERIENCE IT PROPERLY. The mental feeling was of cramped crowding in a nonsensory anteroom.

"Excuse me," said Simmons, "I will only be here for a short . . ."

NO TALKING PLEASE, he was overridden. IT IS UNFAIR TO THE OTHERS. NOW LET ME WELCOME YOU TO THE CORE, THE GREATEST CIVILIZATION IN THE GALAXY, WHERE OVER THREE MILLION SEPARATE SPECIES LIVE IN HARMONIC INTERRELATIONSHIP. YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT WITHIN THESE BOUNDARIES ARE INCLUDED MORE STELLAR SYSTEMS THAN IN ALL THE REST OF THE GALAXY COMBINED. EACH OCCAD AT LEAST 50,000 NEW SPECIES ACHIEVE TELEPATHIC COMMUNICATION WITH US, AND THIS OCCAD YOU YOURSELVES ARE SUCH FORTUNATE REPRESENTATIVES.

"Will this take very long?" asked Simmons. "I've got less than two hours. I don't know how many occads that is, but . . ." He felt an enfolding pressure, soft but irresistible, and found himself incapable of further communication.

PLEASE, said the tour guide sternly, PLEASE BEAR WITH US. OUR PROGRAMMED TOUR HAS BEEN CAREFULLY PLANNED TO PRESENT ALL THE MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION IN THE MOST EFFECTIVE MANNER POSSIBLE. IF THERE ARE QUESTIONS, PLEASE HOLD THEM UNTIL THE END. YOU WILL FIND MOST OF THEM ANSWERED BEFORE THEN.

A delicate line of thought spun up in Simmons's immediate mental vicinity. "But my species is in great peril. We urgently seek help . . ." Reluctantly, the thought died away, muffled to stillness.

YOU MUST NOT DEMAND PERSONAL ATTENTION, chided the guide. THERE ARE 10,000 SEPARATE SPECIES REPRESENTED IN THIS TOUR GROUP. EACH OCCAD UPWARDS OF 29,000 SPECIES REQUEST APPLICATION FOR CORE MEMBERSHIP, AND WHEN YOU SEE THE ADVANTAGES CORE CITIZENSHIP OFFERS, WE TRUST YOU ALSO WILL BE EAGER TO APPLY. SO, WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, LET US VIEW THE GALACTIC CORE.

And space erupted into view. The Galaxy spun in silent majesty beneath, or possibly above them. It was all the more awesome to Simmons in that he was viewing it through six separate senses, four of which he had never possessed before. They were gazing at it through dark skies, through the eyes and other sensory equipment of the archetype of sphinxes, crouching, head on paws, upon warm violet sands.

THIS IS OUR GALAXY, continued the peroration, VIEWED FROM A

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WORLD CONSTRUCTED SOME 30,000 LIGHT YEARS ABOVE THE PLANE OF THE GALAXY. OUR HOST IS TILENGH THE MMCIITH OF THE FURINI RACE. SHE, AND HER IMMEDIATE ANCESTORS, WHOSE FULL MEMORIES SHE POSSESSES, HAVE VIEWED THE GALAXY FROM THIS LOCATION FOR THE PAST EIGHT MILLION YEARS. TILENGH, WOULD YOU MIND TELLING OUR GUESTS WHAT THE MAJOR CHANGES YOU HAVE NOTICED IN THAT TIME MAY BE.

Tilengh flexed her mighty talons, and a properly deep and solemn thought rolled through the packed minds. *Well, Clauf, I suppose the biggest changes visible from here have been the core explosion four and a half million years back, and its containment and utilization during the next million years; and then the dimming of the core in the longer wavelengths, with the concommittant increase in infrared output as more and more inner stars are capped in spheres.*

THEN YOU'D SAY THAT MOST SIGNS OF INTELLIGENCE WITHIN THE GALAXY AS SEEN FROM OUT HERE ARE . . . WHERE, TILENGH?

Oh, the Core, most definitely, Clauf. From out here, it is fairly rarely that we see true signs of intelligent manipulations outside the

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galactic center. The Core, however, has made tremendous strides, quite apparent even from this distance.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH, TILENGH. FELLOW SAPIENTS, THAT IS THE OPINION OF TILENGH THE MMCIITH, POSSESSOR OF A LONGER UNBROKEN VIEW OF OUR GALAZY THAN ANY OTHER KNOWN BEING, AND I THINK YOU'LL AGREE THAT SHE SHOULD KNOW, IF ANYONE DOES. NOW, FRIENDS, WE HAVE A REAL TREAT IN STORE FOR YOU. WE TRUST YOU WILL TREASURE EVERY DETAIL OF THE NEXT SYCCAD, SO YOU CAN SHARE IT PRECISELY WITH YOUR HOME WORLDS.

The small voice was piping again, in a melancholy mode. "My home planet has a life expectancy of *less* than a syccad, unless you folks can get aid . . ." It was muffled.

PLEASE BE MORE CONSIDERATE. A pained tone was apparent beneath the crisp exterior of the guide's thought. IF **EVERYBODY** INSISTS ON SPEAKING, WE'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE. LET ME REMIND YOU THAT IN JUST FIVE SYCCADS, ANOTHER GROUP OF AT LEAST TEN THOUSAND SENTIENTS WILL BE EAGERLY FOLLOWING YOU ON THIS MAGNIFICENT AND INFORMATIVE TOUR ON WHICH YOU ARE NOW EMBARKED. WE MUST KEEP MOVING. NOW, WE HAVE ARRANGED WITH A TOTAL OF ONE HUNDRED SIXTY NINE SPECIES, DOMICILED BETWEEN THIS WORLD AND THE CORE'S CENTRAL SHAFT, WHO WILL MINDSHARE WITH YOU IN SEQUENCE DURING THE NEXT SYCCAD. KEEP ALL YOUR SENSES WIDE OPEN FOR AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE: BECAUSE NOW, FELLOW SENTIENTS AND, MAY WE HOPE, FELLOW COLLABORATORS IN THE GREAT CORE CULTURE, WE GIVE YOU THE GREATEST TREK IN THE KNOWN UNIVERSE . . . THE PLUNGE TO THE CORE OF THE GALAXY. NOW!

And the desert vanished, to be replaced by a somewhat closer view. The Galaxy sprawled wider in a night sky, over the tapering fronds of a boggy marsh in which another creature received the mental passengers for a moment, and then passed them on. Step by step the star swarms neared, breaking up into separate patches and swelling to cover the field of view. The Galaxy, as the trek overran the outspeeding light, appeared to rotate backwards.

Closer and closer, and right into the star fields, the packed center looming up before them, flick, flick, flick; until all the heavens were one blaze of light. There were peripheral screams, quickly stifled, from the more impressionable members of the tour. Through the omnipresent glare slowly appeared an utter blackness, growing at each leap, until the whole sky was dominated by a vast black cylinder driving towards them.

THE SHAFT AT THE CENTER OF THE GALAXY, intoned the guide in

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solemn mode. THE REFERENCE POINT FROM WHICH ALL DISTANCES ARE MEASURED, INCORPORATING IN ITS STRUCTURE ALL OTHER STANDARD MEASUREMENTS AS WELL. HERE THE CORE COUNCIL, ELECTED MILLENNIALLY, MEETS IN PERPETUAL CONCLAVE; HERE ARE FOUND THE GREATEST LIBRARY, MUSEUM, STABLUTCH, ZOO, PHRENATEUM, AND QUAW OF THE WHOLE CORE CULTURE. FELLOW SENTIENTS, LET ME CONGRATULATE YOU AS, FIRST OF YOUR SPECIES, YOU COME TO THE VERY CENTER OF THE GALAXY. I GIVE YOU . . . THE SHAFT!

The final words were perfectly timed, as the kaleidoscopic images came to an abrupt and dizzying halt. The ultimate host lay motionless in space, a large blob of protoplasm studded with every form of sensory apparatus known to sentience. There was a psychic shoving, as ten thousand individual minds struggled to appropriate organs of sense with which they were familiar.

NO NEED TO PUSH. WE SHALL REMAIN HERE A FULL 1.4286 SYCCADS, PLENTY OF TIME FOR EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU TO OBSERVE THE SHAFT TO YOUR COMPLETE CONTENT.

Simmons slipped his way through the mental pack, and located some optics for himself, a bit further into the ultra-violet than he was used to, but with this view it hardly mattered.

The fellow-passenger Simmons had noted before was speaking to him. "Pardon me, but I had the definite impression that you were sympathetic to my attempts to get attention."

"I think it's a shame they didn't listen to you," said Simmons, turning from the view. "Is your world in really grave danger?"

"Done for," said the other. "Too late for us. What I wanted to say was . . . well, I really think things ought to be better run somehow. Maybe sometime you can do something about it. We'd like to think so."

"All this place makes me want to do is run away," said Simmons. "But, look, about your people not getting any help and all . . . I mean, I'm *sorry*."

"Well . . ." said the other. "I guess that's better than noth—"

THE SHAFT IS FULLY CONSTRUCTED IN BLACK HOLE MODE, AS AN OPEN CYLINDER RATHER THAN A SPHERE. THE RESULTANT RELATIVITY PHENOMENA, BY THE WAY, ARE MOST SPECTACULAR. NOW, WE ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ARRANGE AN INTERVIEW WITH THE FIFTEENTH UNDERSECRETARY IN CHARGE OF CORE CENSUS, WHO WILL . . .

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"It's too much," said Simmons tiredly. "Much too much too much. My mind can't encompass it. No man's could. No, nor woman's."

"I wasn't smiling at that, dear."

"You're not smiling at my technique, I hope. You must make allowances, Debbie. I really don't remember how it's done."

"Your body remembers very well indeed. I think maybe it works better when your mind has to let it alone. Don't think about it, just do it."

"Well, if you realize that this is practically an alien body doing alien things, as far as my memory goes, I don't think I'm doing so badly."

"Oh, no, dear Tom, not at all badly . . . Tom?"

"Hmm?"

"If you fall asleep before you go off again, what would happen?"

"I'd spend my two hours in an alien dream. I caught the tail end of that when I entered Virgo."

"I see . . . Mmmmm . . . Tom, that reminds me . . . the wife of the Virgoan . . ."

"What about her?"

"Was she prettier than I am?"

"Look, you don't get on my case about her, and I'll shut up about Scorpio."

"It's a deal. Now snuggle."

"Wish I could, but it's that time again. Bye."

It had to happen sometime, thought Simmons, and really he was a bit surprised it hadn't happened before. He supposed it took a little bit of preparation before the mind could handle mind-sharing at this level of complexity.

He knew exactly where he was. He was crawling through low mud-walled tunnels on flat flippers, and standing on firm tripods on a pitching deck beneath scudding yellow clouds. He was gazing on a baked-ceramic city from a high scalloped tower, and wallowing his bulky form in the mud of a wide-spreading estuary. He looked out, with varied senses, from a myriad different forms, touched as many different minds, and held them all separate. And among them, he kept hold of who he was.

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Now this, thought Simmons, *is more like what telepathy was meant to be.*

We're glad you approve.

His contact, Simmons realized, was a kind of quorum, composed of those entities within his scope who chose to become involved with his presence. Many ignored him, or simply filed him as present, and continued their own concerns, all of which he was aware of: fighting wars, building, moving, loving, thinking. But many turned towards him in their thoughts, wholly or partly, and moved together to form a new temporary entity for the particularized purpose of welcoming Thomas Simmons. He was aware of each sentient in his individuality and of the whole as if it were a combined personality. And yet this newly born whole was constantly gaining new adherents, and shedding previous elements as they became bored, or were called away on more immediate business. And throughout the scope of his perception he could sense other such entities, forming, dissolving, modifying, in groups of from two to millions, for every purpose under the suns.

Hi, said Simmons. *I like the feel of this.*

We sort of like the feel of you, said the newcomer. *You seem to need a name for us. Call us Charley.*

A thought emerged, born in the mind of an amphibian lazing on the shore of a warm tidal beach, modified tactfully by a cook on an interplanetary liner crewed by hydrogen gasbag beings, translated into more human terms by a professor in an anthill warren, and presented as the observation of the collective—all in the fraction of a second.

What you need is a way to turn off *your telepathy, that's all. Would you like that?*

Simmons took what, had he had a body, must have come out as a deep breath. *You better believe it,* he said.

A mini-instant team of experts congealed, examined him, and pointed with a delicate probe of thought to parts of his id. *Think* **thus**, said the others, **so**, *and then do . . . like* **that**. *Got it?*

As easy as that? asked Simmons.

Once you know how, said Charley. *It's finding it the first time that needs help.*

Thank you, said Simmons. *I think that is going to be a great assistance.*

He noted that the components of "Charley" had changed greatly, even in this short time. Members had dropped out, without comment, some, he was chagrined to note, from boredom with his relatively

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simple situation. And yet, glimpsing some of the new things they were turning to, he realized that, objectively speaking, he did present a relatively common and uninspiring problem. Others, however, had merged to enhance and modify "Charley," as the mental grapevine brought in those with a particular interest in such as he.

I gather, said Simmons, *you understand my situation as clearly as I understand yours. Have you any advice for me and my race?*

You're doing just fine, said Charley. *As an individual, in less than a day of your time, you've reconstructed yourself from next to nothing to a socially conscious being again. And your species shows every sign of being able to cope with the new environment with which you will, of course, be presenting them. Just take it easy, feel it out, and remember, don't get too close to any one of the major thought-casters—except of course us.*

Some seem to be more dangerous than others, observed Simmons.

They're all deadly, close up, said Charley. *Deadly to your racial freedom and individuality, which is, of course, what is most important. No species can evolve in the neighborhood of one of those high-power stations without becoming a mini-version of their way of thought. Your people are just lucky you're fairly balanced in position between a number of them. It gives you a certain variety and flexibility in place of slavery. Better keep it that way.*

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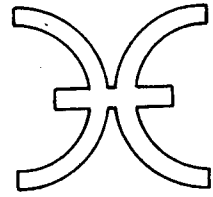
But you're safe? asked Simmons.

Because we don't **want** *you to change to be like us,* came the answer. *Be what you are, or what you want to be. Join any of us you care to, as long as you want, and drop out when you're through with us. That's what life's all about, isn't it?*

You might be right, said Simmons. *I'll think about it. Right now, I'm going home. I'm pretty sure I'll be in contact with you again before long.*

Any time, said Charley, already breaking up and reforming in a thousand other combinations far off. *Drop in any time.*

Simmons reached into his own thoughts, did *thus* and *so,* and then like *that,* and opened his eyes.



He swung his feet out of bed and stood up. He looked at the other people in the room and smiled gaily.

"I want to thank you all for your care of me," he said. "I'm afraid the lot of you are missing your sleep." He moved around the room, shaking hands. "Jim, Art, Dr. Berkson, isn't it? Glad to see you all well. Debbie . . ." He held her close and kissed her with great attention. "Someone get me some coffee, and a BLT on rye. But don't worry. I won't be going anywhere now till I choose."

"You found it?" asked Debbie, looking up at him with half-closed eyes.

"I found it." He gestured expansively to the whole room and beyond it, to the Galaxy. "I've got my memory, I've got control. I can go or not go as I like. I can teach others. Man can join the . . . web of thought out there."

"If you're still here in thirty minutes," said Art Hover, the round-faced man, and Simmons's long-time fellow researcher at the college, "I'll begin to believe you've got it licked. But the way you've been turning on and off like a stoplight, I'll wait till then," he added gruffly, and then flung an arm around Simmons's shoulders and squeezed hard.

"If you're back from the dead," said Jim Lindland, "work a miracle

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for us." He grinned.

"There will be miracles a-plenty," said Simmons. "Soon enough."

Such slow communication, Simmons was thinking. One painful word at a time, one laborious phrase after another. He had certainly been spoiled for oral dialogue. He could have given it all to them by now, if they'd been receivers. No, for humans weren't senders; the Aquarians or Librans would have to be catalysts to allow one human mind to meet another. Well, that could be worked out too.

He walked to the window and drew aside the curtains. Behind him the small cluster of friends were looking at him in uncertain wonder. They didn't yet know for sure whether he was Marco Polo or a run-of-the-mill madman. They'd learn soon.

Outside, over the campus elms, the first glow of dawn was beginning to rim the horizon. The last dawn he'd seen had been the Arian one; this would be less violent, but not less beautiful. It was a good world, and in the last day a chance for making it even better had come up. He'd have to be very careful it was used right.

A bright star blazed in the southeast, fighting the dawn. He traced angles with other stars to identify it. Fomalhaut. Pisces rising. So easily and naturally that it seemed inevitable, the last piece fell into place, and the pattern was done.

The signs were not arbitrary. It was not just a graceful mnemonic. It was real.

He wouldn't try to tell them just yet. They had enough and more to grasp, as man prepared to join the largest stage imaginable. People weren't quite ready to feel happy at the thought that they were at the mercy of alien forces, that formed them at birth. That, at least, was how they would view it.

And yet Simmons now was certain of it. The mechanics of it would have to be worked out, the influence of source and distance, stellar angle and movement, terrestrial position and birthdate. But in a rough and ready way, the groundwork had been laid for thousands of years.

These hard scientists would get their backs up at the very suggestion. But Simmons knew. It was too neat to be mere coincidence. The idea of "astrological influence" was anathema to science. And, until a modus operandi could be demonstrated, rightly so.

But Simmons had been there.

He had drifted before the dawn wind with his Arian host, the umbrella tree, and carved purpose from the stubborn rocks with a Taurean. He had had an interview with the volatile Gemini, and gone home for a while with Cancer. He had been hosted in the realm

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of Leo, and disturbed the tidy world of Virgo, seen Libra struggling for balance, and Scorpio determined to take over the world single-handed. He had stumbled through the suns with Sagittarius, seen the incredible result of the Capricornian organization of the Core, and glimpsed the Aquarian individualism at play.

Even if man's ability to receive was minute and vestigial, he could not utterly avoid the effect of those massive mind-waves sweeping over his little world from without. Each man would be somehow molded by them, starting with the first alien culture under the influence of which he came.

Our salvation, thought Thomas Simmons, comes from our effective equidistance from all those cultures. If we'd been too close to one of them, we'd have been taken over by a single pattern. At least we've got variety, and in that a chance for freedom.

He turned from the window. "Call a full news conference for a couple of hours from now," he said, "and I'll give the world a preliminary sketch of contemporary Galactic civilization. But for now, I've got a little trip to make. I still lack one house."

Debbie moved to him quickly. "Tom, must you? Can't it wait?"

He turned up her face and kissed her gently. "I'll be back, Deb; nothing would keep me away from you. But I've come this far around the wheel; I'll be damned if I'm going to stop while there's still one more house to go." And he opened channels to the universe.

And was washed on the currents of alien thought, swept away 86 parsecs, to that small world out towards Fomalhaut where God awaited him.

He merges with God, hovering in the immensities, containing the universe. God moves over just enough to let him in. *Welcome, lost one, welcome home.*

Simmons melts into the oneness, the sharing, and joins in the chorus, the chanting of the message, to all beings, all life, everywhere and anywhere.

Come, come, come join us in the whole. God is truth, God is beauty, God is love. God waits for you. Come join us, come.

Through a vast quadrant of the galaxy the merging voices pass and penetrate. On a thousand worlds beings of a myriad alien forms, grazing, hunting, swimming, flying, pause, as through their minds strange musics flow, haunting half-felt thoughts spin just beyond their grasp.

God is Truth. Come join us, come.

Some distant epoch, evolved to full powers, they will not fail to

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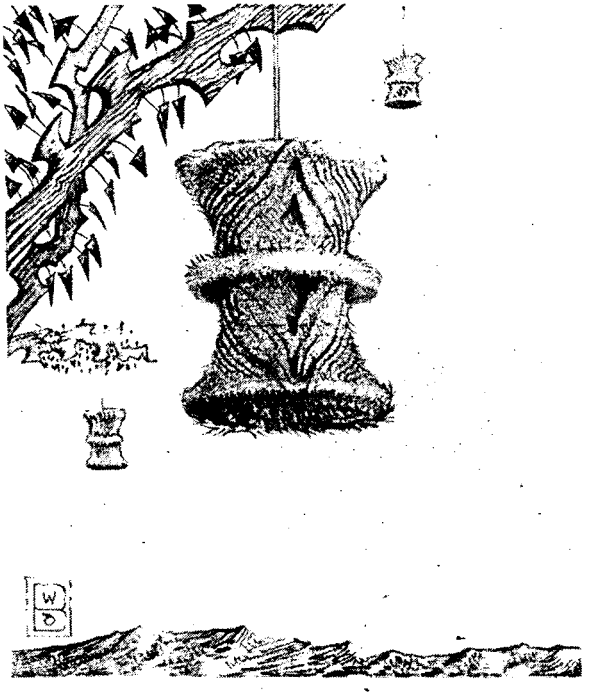
come. The message spreads out to farther worlds, where it touches other flowering minds; slowly fading, no longer overpowering in its intensity, it leaves the chance of choice.

God is Beauty. Join us, come.

On into the distant reaches of space the fringes of the song flee on, wisps and fragments, to where the message will add but the barest touch of lost possibilities and ungrasped beauties, to a still unmolded race.

God is Love, and waits for you. Will you not come?

Simmons knows, as he merges for his two hours of shared divinity, that he is concentered with the denizens of Pisces σ 3, a race of mystic spiders that, wrapped in their cocoons hanging from the plentoon trees, thus send their thoughts soaring into the infinities, and lure ten trillion miles to harmony and peace. Just the strong-minded Piscean spiders. But once you're in with it, it might as well be God. Who knows? It just might really be.



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LETTERS

Letters to the Editor should be sent to us at Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101. Letters to the subscription department (changes of address and the like) should go to Box 2650, Greenwich CT 06830.

Dear Mr. Scithers,

Maybe, as Algis Budrys stated in "The Empire Talks Back", (November '80), there is no "organic" reason for the opening battle sequence of *The Empire Strikes Back* to be filmed on location in Norway; but I'm glad it was. Not only was the background scenery breathtaking, it was also more than cinematic show. A whole different set of tactics would have been required if it were fought on the Rebel's original jungle "planet" stronghold. (Actually it should be called a moon since it was in orbit around a much larger planet.) Jungle wars tend to bog down into a protracted siege campaign. Furthermore, picking up at the point where the first movie ended would have raised such questions as: How did Vader raise another large battle force so fast? Why should the invaders be expected to win quickly? That base movie audiences saw at the conclusion of the first film did not look like it would have fallen easily.

The landscape of Hoth makes it perfectly clear to the viewer that the Rebels are now faced with a battle for survival against overwhelming odds. The tide has turned and time has passed since the joyous victory celebration following the destruction of the Death Star. I'm glad Lucasfilm did not show that proud base being devastated during the long siege that would have been necessary to conquer it. We can see the Rebels have not been on Hoth long. Therefore, we don't question the hasty evacuation or the fact that the initial landing of Darth Vader's ground forces goes unchallenged, and none of them are blasted out of the air while trying to land. Staging the battle on Hoth was the only way Lucasfilm could have achieved the desired brief engagement convincingly.

As far as which one other Yoda had in mind, I don't think Calrissian is the only possibility. He is perhaps the most obvious, but only a chauvinist would dismiss Princess Leia without a thought. You can't say she doesn't have the motive after what has happened to people she cares about in both movies.

What of Han Solo, after he is rescued and thawed out? Surely this will be Calrissian's first goal in the next film. Perhaps even the bounty hunter, Boba Fett, can be either converted to, or forced into,

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the Rebel cause by circumstances to arise in the third part. After all, isn't this what happened to Calrissian himself in the current episode? There may even be somebody Yoda knows about who has not been introduced to us yet. I hope this last possibility does not prove to be the case; however, it is too early to rule it out.

I think it is absurd to suggest the fade to ominous darkness had any connection with anybody's skin color. I saw that fade, when Luke departed Dagobah, more in the manner of a *Bewaare Mc-Skyyywaalker* scene. The only thing missing was a cauldron and three witches, although they would not have seemed out of place in that murky swamp. This leads to another factor. A swamp and a jungle may be too similar to avoid some confusion about what is happening where, when trying to follow several sub-plots. Snowy Hoth made a better contrast.

Finally, why shouldn't Calrissian be "booted and cloaked"? I would expect any city in the clouds, whether it is Bespin of Lucasfilm or Stratos City of Star Trek, to be drafty no matter how good the heating system was. It would certainly be chilly on the spaceport deck.

Patrick M. Stinson
Annandale VA

Dear Isaac & George:

Here's my response to various comments on my *Empire* review:

I paint what I see.

Sincerely,

Algis Budrys

PS: If I were on a floating city, I'd wear a set of coveralls, a parachute, and shoes with very grippy soles.

AJ
824 Seward Street
Evanston IL 60202

As a Star Wars *fanatic, it pleases me that a science fiction movie has enough substance to be argued over in this fashion.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear George,

I am writing to you to update the information on the SFWA which I feel I should periodically offer your readers.

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SFWA—the Science Fiction Writers of America—is fast growing into one of the most active writers' organizations in the country. Active members of the organization receive the *Forum,* SFWA's "secret newsletter"; the *Bulletin,* the official mouthpiece of the organization; and may nominate and vote in the prestigious Nebula Awards, the peer award of the Science Fiction Writing community. Affiliate members, who must have sold at least one story or have shown an abiding professional concern with the field, receive the *Bulletin* (not the *Forum*) and many other benefits.

For full, active membership, you must be a *published* science fiction writer. Your credentials must be acceptable to the membership committee, which at present is chaired by me. Examples of acceptable credentials are at least one book-length work published by a regular publisher (not vanity press) or three pieces of short fiction published in professional markets. If you have *sold* a story which has not yet been *published,* you are only eligible for Affiliate membership until your *published* credits reach the minimums prescribed.

For information on SFWA, send me a stamped self-addressed envelope. If you would like an application form, please do the same.

By the way, George, I do like getting letters from readers anyway, so if any of the readers would like to write and chat, the address is below. I'll try to answer, although answers may be rather brief.

All Best,

Somtow Sucharitkul
Secretary of the SFWA
16 Ancell Street
Alexandria VA 22305

Dear Mr. Scithers and Dr. Asimov,

I would like to say a few things with regard to your September 1980 issue.

First, there seems to be a small problem in the second solution to Martin Gardner's "No Vacancy at the Aleph-Null Inn." The person in room number N was asked to move into room 2N. This means that the person in room N has to travel an increasing distance to his new room as N increases. The person in room aleph-null must travel to twice aleph-null, which would ruin his vacation, since he could never get there.

Secondly, Milton A. Rothman's "On Designing an Interstellar Spaceship" inspired an interesting idea. In this article he mentions

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that the laws of conservation of mass, momentum, and energy are really different cases of the same law. This is logical, since velocity is length divided by time, and length and time are really the same thing (the amount of points in a line divided by infinity times the unit constant), making velocity a unitless value. This seems to imply that there should be other conserved values of the form cmv^n, where c and n are constants, v is velocity, and m is mass. Looking at the already-conserved values, m, mv, and $\frac{1}{2}mv^2$, there appears to be a pattern developing. This pattern is: If C_n represents the nth conserved value, $C_{n+1} = C_n dv$, where v is velocity. If C_n is evaluated, this formula yields, for a constant velocity, $C_n = \frac{mv^n}{n}$.

I would be interested in knowing if Mr. Rothman knows of any experimental evidence to support or deny this.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Russell Impagliazzo
510 Cedar Avenue
East Greenwich RI 02818

Martin Gardner and Milton Rothman reply:

Mr. Impagliazzo is assuming, as you are not permitted to do in Cantorian set theory, that there is a highest positive integer. All rooms in the hotel are numbered with integers, and although they get larger and larger, there is no highest number, and therefore no room with the number aleph-null. Aleph-null is a transfinite number that "counts" the entire set of positive integers.

—Martin Gardner

Things are not as simple as Mr. Impagliazzo suggests. In the first place, momentum is a vector; and energy is a scalar quantity. The three components of momentum together with energy make up a four-dimensional entity called the momentum-energy tensor. In the second place, it is not just kinetic *energy that is conserved, it is the* total *energy. Total energy includes rest-mass energy, kinetic energy, potential energy, and the energy of any fields that are in the system. It is the total energy that appears in the equation* $E = mc^2$, *so that when we say energy is conserved, that is the same as saying mass is conserved. They are not two separate statements. For these reasons we can't make simple generalizations to invent new quantities to conserve.*

—Milton Rothman

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Dear George:

Commendations on an impressive track record: three years of superlative SF before your first clinker. The October 1980 issue was (with the exception of Skip Wall's "Outsider") uniformly boring.

Particular congratulations on your discerning judgment to illustrate the Good Doctor's editorial viewpoint by publishing Avram Davidson's "Peregrine: Perplexed." I couldn't imagine a more tedious and verbose way to demonstrate precisely what Dr. Asimov was referring to by a mosaic.

It's nice to know that my favorite editorial staff is, after all, susceptible to ordinary human frailty.

(Still) devotedly,

The George
Alexandria VA

I don't suppose it's really *necessary to insist that Davidson's tale was not intended as a cautionary example. If you'll let it digest a while and then try to read it again, you may find you like it. The easy can give instant pleasure, but the difficult may give deeper pleasure—eventually.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers,

Please send me your manuscript requirement information, as I am very much interested in submitting my work to your magazine and I wish to do it right the first time.

In regards to the October issue of *IA'sfm,* "The Wheels of Dream," "Outsider," and "Peregrine: Perplexed" were delightful. "Outsider" made an alarmingly true point about the ways people can meddle with the subconscious and thereby possibly gain control via mass media. Being a filmmaker myself, I thought the bits about the technique involved in putting the images or messages on the film well done. And I'm glad to see that Mr. Davidson is still going strong, bless him. Since "Selectra Six-Ten" in a rival magazine's anniversary issue, I've been hooked on his style.

"The Wheels of Dream" had its best points in characterization, with a properly bewhiskered Englishman, a gutsy female, and a strong supporting cast. Bravo, Mr. Ford! And to *IA'sfm* in general: yours is above all my favorite reading material. Thank you for providing consistent quality, something rare these days.

Yours truly,

Lillian Chamberlain
Costa Mesa CA

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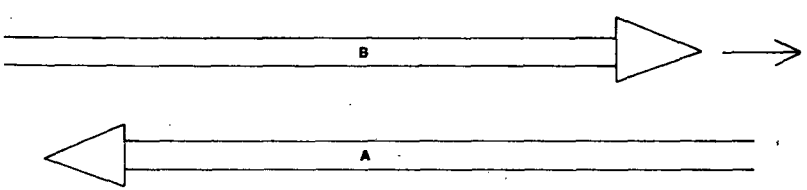
Davidson is still going strong all right, but the last time I saw him his beard was somewhat shorter than it had once been.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers,

In your May 1980 issue you ran an article called "On Faster-Than-Light Paradoxes." I am sure you must have gotten hordes of letters protesting that Milton A. Rothman went too far in concluding that faster-than-light communication was impossible. In fact he did not go far enough. At the end of the article he seemed to suggest that instantaneous communication might be possible if the sender and receiver were stationary with respect to each other. Unfortunately, this leads to the same kind of paradoxes that arise from the situations he considered.

Suppose instantaneous communication is possible if the sender and receiver are not moving with respect to each other. Then it would be possible to equip a spaceship with an instantaneous intercom so that, in the reference frame of the spaceship, if something was said at the front of the spaceship, then everybody in the spaceship would hear it simultaneously. Suppose two spaceships have these amazing intercom systems: spaceship A is stationary and pointed to the left, and spaceship B is pointed to the right and moving to the right at some speed near the speed of light with respect to spaceship A.



Suppose the captain at the front of A decides to blow up the front of spaceship B. He gives the order on his instantaneous intercom. For simplicity I will assume the crew has a negligible reaction time and that the distance between the two spaceships is negligible. Neither of these assumptions is essential to the paradox, but they make the reasoning easier. Thus, in the frame of reference of spaceship

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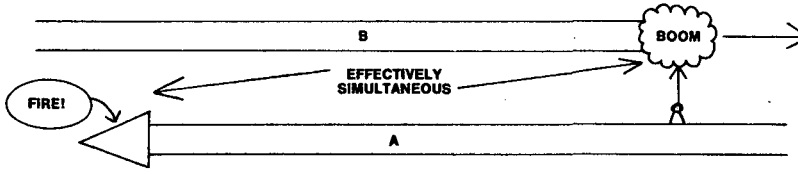
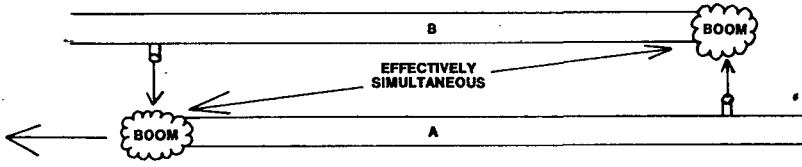
A, the blowing up of the front of spaceship B is effectively simultaneous with the captain of A saying "Fire."



However, the people in spaceship B might hear the explosion over their intercom and immediately decide to blow up the front of spaceship A for revenge. Note that in the frame of reference of spaceship B the explosion happens before the captain of A says "Fire." If they fire back immediately the people in B kill the captain of A before he can give the order to fire.



Captain of A has not had a chance to give the order to fire yet. Thus we are led to a paradox over the question of whether or not spaceship A ever did fire on spaceship B. As in the Rothman paradoxes, it is not essential that instantaneous communication be considered. Any faster-than-light communication would lead to the same sort of problems.

By the way, thank you for putting such an interesting article in your magazine.

Sincerely,

Louis Blair
Champaign IL

The paradoxes of faster-than-light communication are important

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because they show that however much relativity seems to go against "common sense," it is "common sense" itself that doesn't make sense.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I think your October editorial may have inadvertantly done a disservice to some of the many beginning writers who read *IA'sfm* by giving the impression that a writer with a good plot doesn't have to worry about his clichés, wooden prose, stilted dialogue, lack of appeal to the five senses, and cardboard characters. Of course you never said that, and in fact said almost the direct opposite, but only in the fine print, as it were.

I think the average reader thinks of P.G. Wodehouse, Georges Simenon, John D. MacDonald, Stephen King, Robert Ludlum, and Joan D. Vinge as story tellers rather than stylists. (A professional writer or critic would agree with part of this list.) But a would-be writer who examines a few pages by any one of these authors on a word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence basis will see just how much skill and effort goes into creating what seems artless (to paraphrase your own editorial.)

Finally, a word of appreciation to George for the decision to run long stories (despite the effect on the table-of-contents page) and for producing a magazine which frequently manages to surprise me. Maybe one day he'll even manage to surprise me by buying one of my stories!

Sincerely,

Lee Lady
Honolulu HI

. Since I didn't say that, and in fact said almost the direct opposite, I think we can safely leave it to the intelligence of my readers to note and pay attention to what I did *say.*
—Isaac Asimov

Dear George:

This is just a note to express my pleasure at having a second small poem accepted. The first check paid for my subscription to *Isaac Asimov's SF Mag.*, and the second will pay most of the fee for renewal.

Usually I write for the small literary magazines, but they pay

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only with copies, and when the poems are anthologized there seems to be no payment at all, (except ego satisfaction) so your little checks are most welcome.

When I get in the SF mood again I'll send another if I think it good enough.

Quite happily,

Hope Athearn
Mill Valley CA

Poets have a notoriously hard life and we are glad to do what we can to make it a little easier.

—Isaac Asimov

NEXT ISSUE

The 13 April 1981 issue will be one of change and surprise. The change is in our cover logo, and it's rather a sweeping one; see below. The surprise is in our cover art: for the first time ever, we're going to use a fantasy-oriented cover illustration. It's for Roger Zelazny's "Unicorn Variation," and is it beautiful. Now, some of you out there are saying, "But this is a *science fiction* magazine!" Well, all we can say is if Roger Zelazny doesn't deserve a cover, who does? Please withhold judgment till you've seen it—that's all we ask. In addition to Roger Zelazny, the 13 April issue will have stories by Barry Longyear, Ted Reynolds, Sharon Webb, and much more. This one will be a collector's item. On sale March 17. Don't miss it!

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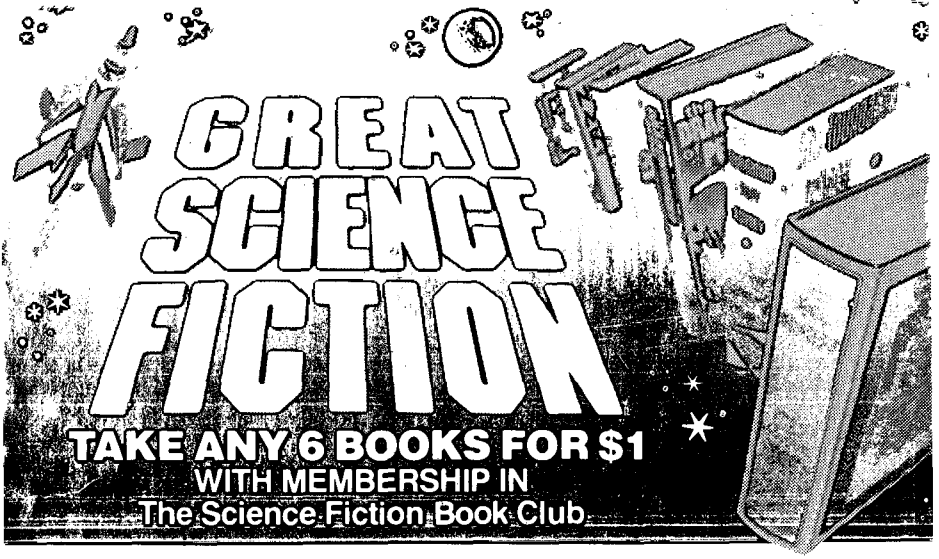

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